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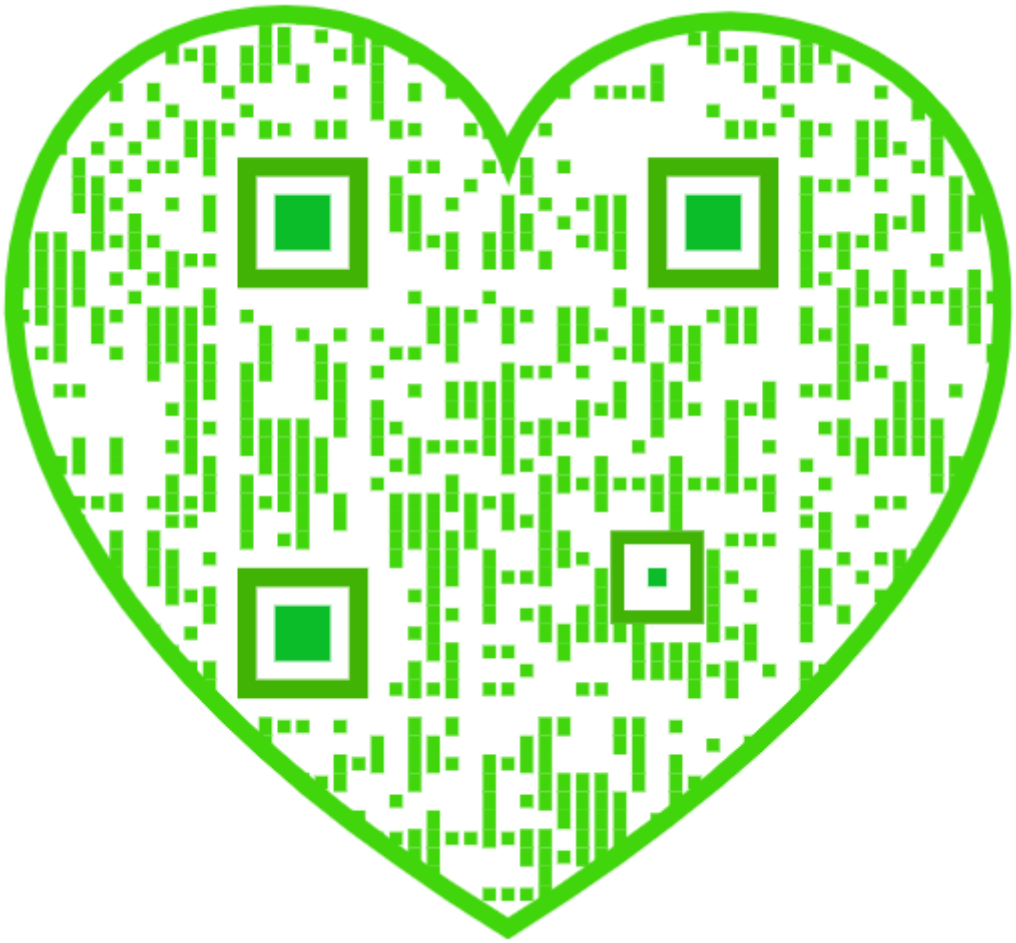
CHARLES HENRY LERRIGO



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"He was rather a wild looking figure in the glare of the firelight" *Frontispiece* (Page 136)

THE BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE

BY

CHARLES HENRY LERRIGO

PUBLISHED WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

PUBLISHERS

BARSE & CO.

NEW YORK, N. Y. NEWARK, N. J.

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Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Old Friends Meet	9
II	The Search Begins	25
III	A New Start	36
IV	Earning Money at the Fair	49
V	"Wild Cats! Wolves! Save Me!"	63
VI	The Wrong Place	75
VII	The Disappearance of Sister Clark	86
VIII	Introducing William Grubb	97
IX	Brick Mason's Story	106
X	In the Hands of the Enemy	117
XI	"God's Over Us!"	129
XII	Sister Clark Rescues Apple	141
XIII	Friday Circumlycution	149
XIV	The Mountain Scouts	159
XV	In the Cave	171
XVI	The Secret Tunnel	183
XVII	Capturing the Kidnappers	194
XVIII	On the Way Out	204
XIX	"Go to Devil's Hole"	210
XX	Safe at Last	220

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BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE

CHAPTER I

OLD FRIENDS MEET

CHICK-CHICK stopped his car with a rather hasty snap of the brakes, very hasty for so careful a driver.

"Where have those red bands disappeared to, Sister?" he asked of his companion, a thin, shrinking boy of about thirteen.

Sister looked up timidly; Sister was quite apt to do things timidly.

"I hadn't missed them," he replied. "I've been— Well, ever since we got into this wild country, I've been thinking how we might meet some of those tough cowboys, you know. I forgot all about the red bands on the telephone poles."

"You do too much thinking," said Chick-chick. "There are no tough cowboys in this country. It isn't wild country; it's just nice prairie. If

there were cowboys they wouldn't hurt us. You're supposed to have been watching the telephone poles to see that we followed the Red Line. Now you run back to the last section line and see which road the red bands took."

"It's too near dark, Chick-chick," said the little fellow. "The only way I could see a band would be by climbing the telephone pole and feeling it."

"It isn't late enough to be dark yet. There's a storm coming up, and that is what makes it gloomy."

"Well, I don't want to be caught in a storm. Why can't we turn the car around and go back together."

"I can't do it, Sister. This old Overfordarrow-pack isn't the kind of car to turn back. If you can't see the bands, you can't feel them. Maybe you could hear them. What was that—a brass band?"

"It was thunder!" shivered Sister Clark.

"So it was, Sister. We'd better push along the way we're headed."

"Well, where are we? I don't think I've seen a soul in ten miles."

"It looks to me as if we were lost, Sister. I'm beginning to be sorry I ever left my happy home."

"You're joking, aren't you, Chick-chick?" asked Sister Clark, anxiously.

"Joking! I should say so. We couldn't get lost in this country if we tried. It's going to rain, but what's the harm, we're going to spend the night with friends, boy. Don't forget it."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said the younger boy, comforted. "There's a cow in that field, so there must be a house near."

"That was a good guess, Sister. Here we go for the house. But we can't beat the rain, for here it comes."

There was a long pull before there was any sign of a house. At last they saw a light twinkling away up above them.

"What's that light doing up there so far above us?" asked Sister Clark.

"A lighthouse, maybe," suggested Chick-chick.

"Don't see why they want a lighthouse out here in the prairie," replied Sister, who had a very matter-of-fact mind.

"Maybe you will, soon," replied Chick-chick. "See the way the water is chasing down this little ravine!"

"Why don't you put on your chains?"

"That's a bright idea, Sister. There's just one

chain that'll stay on. You hop out and fix it."

"Why, I don't know how to put it on. I'll get all wet."

"You can't get much wetter, Sister."

"I'll have to jack up the wheel, won't I? Where's your jack?"

"You don't need a jack; we're on a grade. That's the place to put on chains. You take this chain and spread it out neatly back of the rear wheel. When you say the word, I'll let her slip back about a foot. You shout, 'Right' and I'll slam on the brake. The car stops with wheel covering chain. You pull her over and fasten clips, and there you are!"

"Yes, all covered with mud. And you're in the car under cover."

"That's all right, Sister. I promised your mother I'd make a man of you, I did. This is how you learn to be a man. Besides, you can't handle the car, anyway."

"All right, Chick-chick. I'll try to learn."

He was out in the mud in a moment, adjusting the chain by the help of a flashlight; nor was it long until the welcome click of the clips announced the job completed.

"Good boy, Sister!" said Chick-chick. "It's a

fine job I'll make of you yet. You make me proud, you do! Now we can climb the hill."

"Wouldn't it be great if that house up there should be Mason's!"

"Great isn't just the word, Sister. Anything with a roof would be great, provided, of course, that they'd let us in. But if that were Mason's, it certainly would be scrumptious. It isn't, though, because Mason's is on another road."

"Well, let's just hope it will be, Chick-chick. That won't do any harm."

"No, nor any good either. Hoping is all right, but dreaming isn't, at least not when you're wide awake and climbing a slippery hill. Did you get that?"

"Well, I don't dream much now, Chick-chick. I suppose it is mighty important to get Glen Mason to go with us."

"We can't go without him. If he comes, we'll have a real man along. You wouldn't ask if you knew old Brick."

"I couldn't help knowing him, hearing you talk so much. I reckon he doesn't do any day-dreaming. I s'pose he's never afraid of anything, and always is ready for everything. He's just the kind of fellow I can't be," sighed the boy.

"Don't abuse yourself," said Chick-chick. "When you've been along with Mason a few weeks, you'll see how he does it."

"D'ye think he really will go, for all his letter said he couldn't?"

"Do you think I'd come two hundred miles out of my road if I didn't? I tell you he's got to go. This expedition can't even start without him. Hello, what are we coming to?"

The car had been pulling up the hill, first in high gear, then in intermediate, and finally, chugging along on low, had managed to climb the slippery slope until here, at the summit, it stopped with a gasp, in range of the welcome light.

"Rah!" cried Chick-chick. "They have a telephone. Now we can get Mason's. It can't be many miles away."

"Suppose my dream that this is Mason's should be right?" suggested Sister.

"You pack that dream away on ice so it'll keep till you can use it," directed Chick-chick. "Mason's house is on the Red Line; Brick told me so himself."

A knock at the door brought a farmer carrying a lantern, the condition of his clothing indicating that he had just come in from the storm.

"We are looking for Mrs. Mason's, and have lost our way. May we use your telephone?"

"Telephone was knocked out about fifteen minutes back. Lightning did it, I guess. Mason's, did you say? It's just a section away. Two miles around the road."

"Don't know that we can cover two miles in this rain," said Chick-chick. "Every time its wheels go around, this old car acts as if it hated to leave the mud."

"If you drove a team, I could show you a short cut across the prairie."

"My old Overfordarrowpack goes anywhere a team can go, but she can't swim."

"Well, if you want to try it—"

"We do. Point out the track, please."

"I'll do better'n that, for friends of the Masons. There's some gates to open. I'll go along an' fix 'em, an' I'll stay with ye until I can show ye their lights."

Chick-chick thankfully drove into the farmyard. Following the farmer's direction, he found a fairly definite wagon track, a much firmer surface than the clinging mud of the road. At the gates the farmer officiated, and continued with them until, at the top of a mound, he called a halt.

"Right ahead ye see two lights," he directed them. "They're the Masons' lights. There's another light that flickers around there. That's some one out with a lantern—prob'ly it's Glen finishing his chores."

"Good old Glen," said Chick-chick. "We'll give him some surprise."

"Don't be too sure of that. He can see your headlights, so he knows something's going to happen. Drive slow now, an' look out for chuck holes. Good night."

Chick-chick had no inclination to drive slowly, but after dropping into one chuck hole and hearing an ominous groan from his springs, wisdom prevailed. He crawled along, drawing a little nearer and a little nearer, but still far from the twin lights ahead, when suddenly a clear strong voice hailed from the pitch darkness, "Who travels my private road to-night?"

Sister Clark trembled, yet hastened to reply in a tremulous squeak, "Friends!"

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign!"

There was a jocular ring in the strong voice, and, although the darkness revealed nothing, one might have felt sure of a corresponding twinkle in the speaker's eye.

Chick-chick whispered directions to Sister, for he did not wish his own voice to be heard.

"Be prepared," sang out Sister in a braver tone.

"A good password," came the voice from the darkness. "It's always good at this camp. Let me in, you good scouts, and I'll soon get you fixed up like jolly good fellows should be."

The car stopped. Chick-chick opened the door.

"Hop over into the back seat and let him in," he ordered.

Glen Mason took one step up, and the next moment, as the dim light revealed the features of the driver, he fell on him with all his lusty might.

"Chick-chick!" he yelled. "Wow! Henry Henry! My own old side partner! Chick-chick! Wow! Wow! Wow! Let me holler the roof off. Chick-chick!"

He was shaking his old chum by the shoulders, when his hands were not engaged in slapping his back and chest and fending off from his own person the friendly advances of his mate.

Sister Clark looked on with admiring eyes in which stood drops of moisture. He was envying their enthusiasm. Would he—Sister Clark—ever have any one make much of him in that way; he, who was afraid to let go of some protecting hand,

and who had been "Sister" to every boy since the period when his mother hesitated too long about decapitating his lovely curls? Sister was Chick-chick's companion only because the good-hearted boy had yielded to the pleading of parents who at last realized that their son needed something to put iron in his frame. Would he ever be one of the parties in such a scene as this?

They quieted at last.

"Start up the grand machine again, Chicken," ordered Brick Mason familiarly. "Let me take the helm and we'll soon reach the harbor. No gates ahead! Right into our back yard we go, and mother will be mighty glad to see you."

"No gladder than we shall be to see her," said Chick-chick. "We're wet all through and as hungry as alligators. This is Sister Clark, Brick. His right name is William."

"Shake, old boy!" said the big fellow, turning to Sister. "The best man I ever knew goes by the name of 'Sister.' He's captain of his football team, is six feet and one inch long, and is as broad as a house. He doesn't mind the name a bit—he saves it for his friends."

"Thanks," said the little fellow. "You're mighty good." And in his heart sprang up a loy-

alty that never wavered in all the years he knew Glen Mason.

"Mother!" shouted Glen, leaping from the car and rushing to the open kitchen door, "see who's here! It's Henry Henry! He's wet and he's hungry, and he has a friend. They're going to stay all night."

Mrs. Mason stood in the doorway as the draggled boys came up.

"I'm so glad you could come, Henry," she said, greeting Chick-chick as an invited guest. "Your friend is welcome, too. We want him to feel right at home."

"William Clark, he is, Mrs. Mason," said Chick-chick by way of introduction. "He isn't as used to this kind of thing as I am. He'll be glad to get warm and dry."

"Get right in behind the range,William. You'll get something hot to drink in a minute and then you shall have some dry clothes. This is Violet. She will give you some hot cocoa."

William felt himself blush deeply as he met the glance of a pretty girl a little older than himself, but his blushes were quite lost beneath his coat of mud.

"I remember you were a heavy drinker when I

met you before, Mr. Henry," said Violet as she gave Chick-chick his steaming cup.

"Oh!" cried Chick-chick. "Mr. Henry! Must I begin all over again? When you left our camp you waved your hat and said 'Good-bye, Chick-chick.' "

"You're more than a year older, now," Violet explained. "I've been growing up, and I thought you might have been doing the same."

"Never!" Chick-chick denied the imputation in vigorous scorn. "Never! I shall be Chick-chick to this family as long as I live. Some folks don't like such names, but I—after I'm as used to a familiar name as I am to Chick-chick, I'd be lost without it."

He looked at Sister Clark as he spoke, and once again Sister blushed.

"All right, Chick," said Violet. "You may go to Glen's room, now. He's just carried up a bucket of hot water, and I'll give you some towels."

It was a joy indeed to be snug in that comfortable room where Glen had planted a big tub which he filled from the kitchen range.

"Chick-chick, you can wear my plunder," he announced. "I hardly know about you, Sister. I'm

afraid my goods would flap about you like a sail in a dying wind. I believe you could get into some of Jimmie's duds. He's only eleven, but he's a little elephant.''

''I reckon I could,'' admitted Sister Clark. ''I'm most fourteen but I'm eleven-year-old size.''

''Here you are, then. Complete outfit. When you get the dirt off and the clothes on, come down to supper.''

''Isn't he simply great?'' ejaculated Sister Clark as the door closed behind his new hero.

''Great! He's the very best. And all made over from the ash pile, as you might say.''

''Whatever do you mean?'' cried Sister, checking his operations with wide-open eyes threatening to become full of soap.

''It won't hurt Glen Mason if I tell you about it, Sister. It might help you to know how a fellow can be made over. That's the way Glen thinks about it. Once in a while some one taunts him with what he used to be. Old Brick just looks at them, and says, 'Yes,' he says, 'and God can do as much for you or for any one else. I was a reform-school boy, just as you say. I was God's man then, only trying to run from Him. Now, I'm God's man, willing to run anywhere *for* Him.''

"Glen Mason a reform-school boy!"

"That's what he was when first I knew him. And look at him now. Brick Mason is the biggest sermon I ever heard."

"He must be," said Sister quietly. "He's fine. I hope I can be a man like that some day."

"Glen says the pattern he follows is free to every one," said Chick-chick. "I'm trying it myself."

The boys finished their dressing in a sober mood, which changed to one of great exhilaration as they descended to the cheer of the dining room. A welcome odor greeted their nostrils, and a welcome vision entranced their eyes. No picture could have better attracted two hungry boys than that table loaded with plates of hot biscuit, steaming vegetables, dainty eggs, a great knuckle of ham, with fruit, jelly, and honey displayed in shining glasses. They sat down in a glow of anticipation, and their mouths watered as Mrs. Mason asked the blessing.

When at last the conversational stage of the meal was reached Mrs. Mason turned to Chick-chick. "I can't tell you how glad we are to see you, Henry," she said. "I suppose you are mak-

ing your trip in this direction to take the place of the one you had planned for the Ozarks? I was so sorry to have to write you that Glen could not be spared."

Chick-chick's face reddened with confusion. "No, Mrs. Mason," he blurted out. "I haven't given up, yet. I came to see you because I believe you'll let Glen go when you know what I want. We just have to have him."

"Why, Henry!" Mrs. Mason's eyes dilated in genuine surprise. "Whatever is so important? One would think it some matter of life or death."

"I'm afraid it is, Mrs. Mason."

"You look quite well and strong, Henry," laughed the hostess. "I fear you must exaggerate. For whom is it life or death?"

"For some one who is as much to me as Glen is."

"Why, whoever can it be? And why is it a matter of life and death?"

"It's quite a story, Mrs. Mason, and it'll take a good deal of telling. But I can tell you the name in a couple of words, and I think you'll agree that he's all I've said."

He paused and they waited silently, for the

merry-hearted, quick-tongued Chick-chick was apparently controlling emotion quite unlooked for in him.

"It's Apple Newton!" he exclaimed, and his voice choked as if he might have been gulping back a sob.

CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH BEGINS

THE family remained around the table while Chick-chick told his tale of engrossing interest:

"You remember, of course, that it was about the beginning of the year when Captain Newton died. Apple had expected to enter college as soon as he had finished high school. He intended to study medicine. But Captain Newton's salary was about all he had, and when he died, of course it stopped."

"We would have been glad to give the dear boy a home," said Mrs. Mason, with a little catch in her voice.

"So would plenty of people right in our town. But you know Apple. Duty's the first thing with him, always, and his duty to his father wouldn't let him seem to be an object of charity. He wanted to study medicine and he knew that somewhere he had an uncle—a half brother of Captain Newton's

—who was a doctor. This man was absolutely the only relative Apple had. After quite a hunt, he found his address and wrote to him.''

''That seems to me to be just the most sensible thing he could have done,'' said Violet. ''Corliss Newton was always sensible.''

''Yes, it looked sensible. But what's become of Corliss now?'' exclaimed Chick-chick. ''This doctor uncle of his was so interested that he actually came up to our town to see about the boy himself!''

''That's not such a strange proceeding for a man who was the only living relative,'' said Mrs. Mason.

''Not so strange to you, Mrs. Mason, but to me —well, I drove him all around our country. I heard his raspy voice, and saw his pinched-up smile, and noticed how he gripped a penny till it almost flattened out. It seemed very strange that he should show so much interest in a homeless, penniless boy.''

''But those conditions are exactly what should make him show interest!''

''He made a great point about Apple's having no one on earth but him. He was a great doctor down in his own country, he said. He had a big institution of some kind, he did. Said he was go-

ing to take Apple down and make a man of him, he was. And the thing I most hated about him, he said to Apple: 'You'll have to study and work like everything down there. Just make up your mind not to be homesick or hampered with old connections. Cut loose from everything, for you are coming along with your only living kin.' "

"Didn't he think friends whom he had known a lifetime counted as much as kin that had only sprung up overnight?"

"That's what I thought. Apple thought so, too, I guess, because he said to me the very last thing: 'Uncle says I'm to cut loose from everything and start out new, Chick-chick, old boy. But I'm going to be awfully lonesome for my old scout partners, and for the old home and the camp. I'm going to have just one steady correspondent. That'll be you. And I want you to write and tell me every single thing that happens, and never let more than a week go by without answering my letters.' I hated to see Apple go, and I promised."

"Of course you've done it, old scout?" asked Glen. "If you haven't kept it up, we'll have a settlement right here."

"I haven't had any chance to keep it up," said Chick-chick mournfully.

"What do you mean? You can't make us believe that Apple hasn't written to you. Something must have happened to whatever he sent you."

"Two postal cards were written on his trip down. That's the full correspondence."

"But you didn't fail to write because of that, did you? Perhaps your letters went astray."

"I've written again and again to the address he gave me—it's one of those R. F. D.'s. I've written cards and sealed letters, and I've put my address on the left-hand corner and on the flap at the back, but they never come back. Neither do any replies come, though I've begged and implored him to send just one word to say he is still alive."

The faces of the listeners presented blank astonishment.

"Whatever can be the explanation?" exclaimed Violet. "Nothing could prevent Corliss Newton from replying to such letters if they reached him."

"Perhaps they go to the wrong address," suggested Mrs. Mason.

"Supposing they do," agreed Chick-chick. "Apple Newton knows my address. Is he the kind of fellow to get mad and refuse to write because my letters have gone astray?"

"Not Apple Newton!" cried Glen. "He'd

write and give you the very politest, kindest reminder that ever was. I know good old Apple.''

''So do I,'' said Chick-chick, ''and I can only think of two explanations. One is that he is prevented from writing; the other that he is—''

''Not dead, Chick-chick! Don't say that.''

''Well, what else?''

''But in that case, his uncle would—''

''I don't know that he'd do anything. I don't trust that man. I'll tell you what he did do, and you can believe his story if you want to.''

''You have heard from him, then. Why didn't you say so?''

''Just lately I have. I sent him a registered letter. Here's his reply: 'I have bad news to tell you of Corliss. Shortly after arriving here he became violently ill with an attack of malaria in virulent form. He recovered slowly, but his fever ran high for weeks. There were many things against him—his grief over the recent loss of his father, his journey away from his friends, and the fact that he was very homesick. It is not so very strange that he became mentally unbalanced. I had scarcely realized his condition when he disappeared. I have searched for him in every direction, but fear that I must give up hope.' ''

After the reading of the letter the little group about the table sat silent for a moment.

"It is a cold letter," said Glen. "Not a regret in it. Has this uncle anything to gain by Apple's disappearance?"

"Not that I know of. But perhaps he knows more than we do. He gives the boy up just as if it didn't matter much. But I can't give him up and I won't."

"Nor I," said Glen.

"Dad thinks things look queer, too, and when he saw how worried I was, he said, 'You'll have to get this out of your system before you'll be any good to me, Henry. Go along and satisfy yourself.'"

"And he gave you the car?" asked Violet.

"No, he did not. My dad has no cars to give away. He's just a poor garage man. You wait till you see my car in daylight, and you won't think he gave it to me."

"What is it? I mean, what make is it?"

"It's a very high-bred car. It's no simple kind. It has in it the blood of the Packard and the Pierce-Arrow as well as the iron service of the Ford and the Overland—a little bit of most everything that ever broke loose in our shop. I call it my Over-

fordarrowpack, and it's hard to beat. But as for the cost—why, the expense isn't anything in actual cash—it's all in brain work and tinkering.''

''It's a fine car for service,'' ventured Sister Clark.

''It's good enough,'' modestly admitted Chick-chick. ''It'll get us wherever we want to go. The question is, are we going? You've heard me through, Mrs. Mason. There's Apple Newton, miles and miles away from friends, as good as dead to the world. Are we just going to let him go as if he really were dead?''

Mrs. Mason's eyes filled with tears.

''We are not, my boy,'' she replied, ''not if my Glen can help. Captain Newton did more than any other one man for Glen, and if we can help it, his boy shall not go unaided. He's my boy just as much as Glen is, or you are. Glen shall go to-morrow if he likes.''

Chick-chick did not indulge in his customary exuberance. He reached across the table to Mrs. Mason and shook hands with her as if she were a man. But Glen walked around behind her chair and kissed her.

''When will you start?'' asked Violet, relieving the tension of the moment.

"Whenever Glen is ready; the sooner, the better."

"We'll go to-morrow," said Glen. "Jimmy will be home in the morning, and he's big enough now to do the chores. If it doesn't rain too much, we'll start the first thing in the morning."

In the morning the sun was shining brightly, Jimmy had reached home safely, and the whole family gathered to admire the Overfordarrow-pack.

"It looks just like a real automobile," declared Glen. "I don't see how you ever hammered it together."

"It's nothing for me," said Chick-chick modestly. "Automobiles became popular the year I was born. I'm the original man who had no money, not even a cent, but his taste to a motor was constantly bent; he got some wire and a big tin can, took his bearings from the sun and wheels from a plan; made his axles out of wood and his brakes in his youth, and before a year was passed, had a car, forsooth!"

"That's all very well, Henry," remarked Mrs. Mason, arriving on the scene. "I know you can do some wonderful things; but you can't make rubber tires and I believe you'd have some difficulty

with gasoline and oil expenses. How are you to meet those expenses?''

''Earn it as we go along, Mrs. Mason,'' replied Chick-chick. ''I don't know just how we shall manage, but whenever we need anything we shall have to stop long enough to earn it. No slackers in this crowd.''

''It shouldn't be any great hardship for resourceful boys,'' agreed Mrs. Mason. ''Now come to breakfast.''

Another bountiful meal, and they were ready to go. Chick-chick cranked the Overfordarrowpack, and they were off on their adventure.

Their journey through the heavy mud was slow, but soon they came to a country where no rain had fallen, and were able to make better speed. Shortly after noon, they stopped to eat the lunch provided by Mrs. Mason, and had not gone much farther when Chick-chick claimed their attention.

''D'ye see that smoke, fellows?'' asked he. ''Look away over in the east. There's just enough showing to dim the blue of the sky.''

''I see it,'' cried Glen.

''That means Kansas City. We're about twenty-five miles outside the finest city of the West.

Soon we shall cross into Missouri. That's my native state."

"He admits it without a blush," said Glen.

"Admit it I do not," asserted Chick-chick—"I *claim* it. It's the finest state to be born in, the finest state to live in, and the finest state to die in. Isn't that so, Sister?"

"I suppose it is," said Sister. Himself a native son, he had longed to be able to say something like this, but his spirit failed him even in so modest a feat.

The improved roads alone were sufficient indication of the approach to a large city. Soon they were running at a good rate on level pavement, though the fields showed that they were still in the country.

"This is splendid!" exclaimed Glen.

As they neared the city the rush of traffic became heavier, and when at last they reached its traveled streets, it was quite bewildering. But Chick-chick guided his Overfordarrowpack with unerring hand.

"This is the Paseo. I've a friend living a little farther along, where the smaller houses are," said Chick-chick, as the car rolled along the wide boulevard with parks on either side.

"Let's get off to a side street," begged Sister Clark.

"Hold up, Sister!" counseled Glen. "Leave it to Chick-chick. There's no danger, is there, Chicken?"

"Not for the careful driver," said Chick-chick. "These fellows who break the speed limit, though, are always finding trouble. There's a bunch of them passing us now. Go on, if you—Say, Brick, look at that driver, quick! Did you see him?"

"Just a glance, Chick-chick. And he looked very much like—"

"Mat Burton! I should say!"

"I'm just about sure," said Glen.

"Well, it isn't so surprising; they moved to Kansas City quite a while back. But from the way he's acting, I'm afraid he's just about the same Matty that he was."

Reaching the top of the hill they saw a crowd gathering, and people running from every direction. Lying in a ravine just off the boulevard was the handsome touring car and its occupants, all in a dismal muddle.

Matty had broken the speed limit once too often.

CHAPTER III

A NEW START

TRUE to their training as scouts, Glen and Chick-chick were out of the car and elbowing their way through the crowd like a flash. They gave only a glance at the wrecked car, just enough to see that it was empty. Then they pushed on down the ravine to the place from which came excited cries.

No policeman had yet arrived. Men and women were telling each other to run for a doctor, exclaiming how awful it was, or saying how sure they felt that such a fate must overtake reckless drivers. Two of them were making ill-advised efforts to get a half-conscious boy to his feet. The boy was Matt.

Glen turned his attention to this group.

"Let him down," he ordered. Recognizing a note of authority, they gladly obeyed. "He is suffering from shock. Put your bottle away. He would only choke on that stuff, and anyway he

never should have it. Rub him! One of you rub his arms, and the other his legs. He's breathing pretty well, but I'll make some friction over his heart. Run over to the nearest house and get some hot coffee. Aromatic spirits of ammonia would be better if we can get it."

A policeman, just arrived, bent over them, but made no effort to interfere. "You're a boy scout, aren't you?" he asked. "Go ahead. You know more about it than I do. The ambulance will be here in a minute or two."

"How are the others?" asked Glen.

"Not so bad as this boy. One has a broken arm, and another has a scalp wound."

Matt opened his eyes for a moment and looked up into Glen's face. "Brick Mason!" he gasped. "Where am I? How did you happen to be here?"

"Shut your eyes, Matty, and don't worry. Everything is all right," responded Glen.

The clang of the ambulance bell broke upon their ears.

"I remember now," cried Matt. "We went over the bank. Are the other fellows badly hurt?"

"Nothing very serious," said Glen. "Don't bother about them now."

"Say, don't let them take me home in that ambulance. You'll have all the neighbors guessing about it. Call a jitney and get me away quietly, Brick; that's a good fellow!"

"Keep quiet, Matt," responded Glen. "You'd keel over if you tried sitting up even for a minute. You're talking too much, anyway."

It was true, for the exertion made Matt again shut his eyes. The next moment the ambulance surgeon was at his side.

"It's young Burton," he said. "I'm more sorry than surprised."

"He's a friend of mine," said Glen.

The young doctor looked at the plainly dressed boy in surprise. "You weren't with him in the car?" he asked.

"No, I was just passing. I've been giving him treatment for shock. Is it anything more serious? He's very anxious not to go in the ambulance."

"He'll have to. I can't tell what may be wrong until I've given him a careful examination at the hospital. He won't mind when he sees I'm in charge. His father and mother are both away, and I suppose he's afraid that something might reach them through the newspapers. But perhaps I can fix the newspapers for once."

A little color had crept back into Matt's face. Evidently he had heard some of the conversation. "It's Dr. Brinkley, isn't it?" he asked, his eyes still shut. "I get awfully dizzy when I open my eyes, but I know your voice. You'll look after me, won't you, Doctor? And keep tight hold of Mason. I want him, too."

"All right, Matt," said the doctor. "I don't know how much consideration you deserve, but we'll both stay by you. We're going to load you into the ambulance, now, so hold on to yourself."

"I have a car here, old boy," said Glen, patting Matt's hand. "Chick-chick and a fellow you don't know are with me. We'll follow the ambulance."

Sincerely sorry as they were for Matt Burton, this was yet a most exciting adventure for the boys, and they were keenly alive to the vivid interest opening up as they followed the ambulance on its way to the hospital.

Dr. Brinkley spoke to them as they stopped at the gates.

"Park your car over there in the shade," he suggested, "then all of you come in. I want to do something to help this wild boy, who, for all his

wildness, is a mighty fine fellow. Perhaps you can help me.''

Matt was fully conscious when he was placed on the operating table. The experienced surgeon quickly ascertained that there were no broken bones or other concealed injuries, and had him removed to a private room.

''I think your trouble is all shock,'' he said. ''Now that you have revived, you are better off than your partners. One has a scalp wound that required eight stitches, the other a broken arm.''

''Let me get up and see them,'' demanded Matt. ''I want to tell them what an idiot I was to get them into this. I never dreamed—''

''Oh, they know that well enough,'' interrupted the doctor. ''You can't get up yet, and besides, both of them have been taken home.''

''But I'm responsible for the mix-up and I must do something to help,'' urged Matt. ''Please telephone them that father will pay all expenses. I know he will do it, though I dislike to have him know.''

''Expense isn't the big thing with your father; the disturbing thing will be how he'll feel when he hears that you're in trouble again. You remember how you promised—''

"Yes, I remember, Doctor, and I wish he didn't have to know until he gets home and I can tell him myself. I might have some chance to make good before then, to show him I mean it."

"You've had chances before, Matt. What did you do with them?" Dr. Brinkley, an intimate friend of the family, knew whereof he spoke.

"I know it, Doctor; I know it. But I've got to keep on trying, haven't I? It wouldn't do for me to give up. I must keep on till I make good. Doctor, you don't know these fellows, Brick Mason and Henry Henry, but they're just the ones who can help me. I'm going to get them to stay here and—"

He saw the negative in Glen's eyes and Chick-chick's sorrowful shake of the head. "Won't you fellows stay with me?" he cried.

"Sorry, old boy, but we can't do it," said Glen. "It isn't that we wouldn't be mighty glad to help you, but we're on an important errand, one that may mean life or death to our old partner, Apple Newton!"

"Apple Newton!" cried Matt. "Why, what's wrong with old Apple? Tell me about it."

Matt listened with eager interest. "I'm going with you fellows and help Apple out of trouble,"

he announced. "Father thought so much of Apple. Besides, the trip will take me away from my old crowd for a while."

There was a welcome response in the eyes of the boys, but before they answered, they glanced inquiringly at the doctor.

"I don't see but what it would be all right," said the young man with a smile. "I'd like to go with you myself. As a close friend of the family, I feel sure that Mr. Burton would agree. But you are in your uncle's charge, Matt, and you must ask him."

"Uncle will let me go, all right," said Matt confidently. "I'm not so sure that he'll let me have any money. The last time I got into trouble he said that would be the end as far as he was concerned. But he'll let me go."

"That's all we want," said Chick-chick.

"Yes, but it would be fine if he'd let me have the car fixed up and take it along. It's got some power, I tell you!"

"But I'm the pilot of this expedition, and I have my own car which has power enough," answered Chick-chick.

"That's the way to talk!" said Dr. Brinkley. "If Matt goes on this trip, he'll have to make up

his mind to have three guides and guardians. One will be Brick Mason, one this pilot fellow, and the other Matt Burton himself."

"Good enough," cried Glen, "except that there'll be four instead of three. You forgot to count in Sister Clark. He sings in this quartet. Don't you, Sister?"

Sister Clark had been sitting quietly to one side, paying keen attention, but attracting none, and feeling rather outside of it all. How his timid heart throbbed with the joy of being "counted in"!

"When do you start?" asked Matt.

"We had promised ourselves to spend to-morrow in Kansas City, and start early the following morning."

"I'll be ready by that time, won't I, Doctor?" pleaded Matt.

"I think so," agreed the doctor. "You'll do well to get some sleep now, though. I'll send you home later."

"Send some one to the house with these boys, please, Doctor," said Matt. "Telephone Jennings they are on the way. Tell him to give them the best in the house."

Not one of the boys had ever entered the portals of such a home as the Burton mansion. Sister

Clark was inclined to be afraid of every servant, to tiptoe along the halls, and to cast his gaze around only by stealth, until he perceived the independent conduct of the two scouts, who had seen no more of such places than had he, yet made themselves quite at home.

"Why, Glen!" he ejaculated, when the door of the room was shut, "I'm scared to death. I hardly dare breathe for fear I'll do it the wrong way. But you act as if you came every day."

"That's the way to act," said Glen. "This is the home of a friend who has asked me to be his guest. It would be absurd for me to worry because I may fail in some little form or custom."

In the morning the boys found Matt at breakfast, quite himself again.

"I've been talking to my uncle on the phone," he announced. "He says I may go, but it's just as Dr. Brinkley said—he won't give me a cent."

"What d'ye want him do?" asked Chick-chick, who reverted to his old jerky style of speech when disturbed.

"Oh, I thought he might advance a couple of hundred dollars, and maybe let us have a real good car."

"What's the matter with the car we have?" asked Chick-chick, still aggressive.

"Oh, it's all right," said Matt. "I'm not saying a thing against it, but you know that with a good car, with, say—"

"Stop it right now, Matty," said Glen. "Let's have it understood that if you go with us, you'll travel our way. Put us in a car worth four or five thousand dollars, and we'd be a mark for every thief in the country."

"Another thing," spoke up Sister Clark quite boldly, "Chick-chick built his own Overfordarrow-pack on purpose for this chase, and it would be mean not to use it."

"I guess I'm outvoted," laughed Matt. "Whatever you fellows do, I'll do. I suppose there's no objection to my bringing along what money I have of my own. It's just a hundred and ten dollars."

"You can bring it along," agreed Glen, "but it is understood that we earn the money for this trip as we go. If it should be necessary to spend money when we find Apple, it might come in handy."

They spent a thrilling day seeing all the wonders of the city, under Matt's guidance, but early

the following morning they were ready to take the road again.

All that day they traveled through country which might well cause the Missouri boys to exult with pride in their native state. The afternoon sun was beginning to wane when Glen reminded them that they must earn their suppers, or go hungry.

"I don't care so much about supper," said Chick-chick. "That lunch we brought from Burton's is still with me. But I might as well say that another ten miles sees the last of our gasoline."

"I've been reading those notices of the county fair for the last hour," said Sister Clark. "Look ahead, there. I can see the tents right now. Let's stop there."

"Good idea," agreed Chick-chick. "We can carry fifteen gallons, cost us about three dollars. Got to earn three dollars at little old county fair."

"Use some of my money to-day," suggested Matt.

"We told you we wouldn't do that," objected Glen.

"Don't be foolish," urged Matt, drawing a bunch of currency from his pocket and reaching

over to shake the bills in Glen's face. "Here's the money. Use it."

"You're the foolish one, to be flapping money around that way!" exclaimed Glen. "Didn't you see those fellows in the road looking at you?"

"They can't catch me," said Matt, reluctantly putting his money away.

At the fair grounds there were scores of cars parked along the side of the road. Chick-chick had difficulty finding a vacant space and at last was obliged to take a place far from the gates.

"One must stay and look out for the outfit," Glen decided. "The other three must earn a dollar each, and enough over to do for supper and breakfast."

"Let Clark stay here," suggested Matt. "He's the youngest."

"Let's draw straws," objected Sister. "I'm going to do my share!"

The lot fell to Matt. The other boys, starting their quest for work, found to their dismay that at this late hour every one seemed to be supplied with help.

"We don't have to get the gasoline to-night," said Glen, coming from a big dining tent, "but we

must get food. This man says we may have supper for waiting on the table. Sister, tell Matt to bring the Overfordarrowpack along this way."

In but a couple of minutes Sister Clark came running back.

"Matt has gone crazy," he cried. "I shouted, but he paid no attention to me. His clothes were ruffed up, and he just tore clear along the road."

CHAPTER IV

EARNING MONEY AT THE FAIR

FOR a moment the three boys stood in bewildered indecision.

"It can't be more than a couple of minutes since Matt started," said Glen.

"No, I ran right here," assented Sister.

"There's trouble somewhere," said Chick-chick. "Matt isn't crazy; he's mad. If his clothes are torn, it's because he's been having a fuss with some one. It's not like Matt to have torn clothes for nothing."

A man wearing a star on his coat passed them, and to him Glen appealed for help. He listened to their story without interruption.

"You say he was showing a roll of bills right out in the open road? Well, some one has helped him to get rid of 'em. He's probably started after 'em, though what he'll do if he catches up is hard to say. My car's right here. I reckon we'd better follow 'em."

"He can't go very far," said Chick-chick. "We

were running short of gas. If you can wait a minute I'll use my last coin to get a couple of gallons to take out with us."

"Very well. Here's a place. Get it while I do some telephoning."

Glen stepped over to the garage with Chick-chick to buy the needed fuel.

"Take a look at Sister Clark when we go back," said Chick-chick. "He's scared blue at the prospect of chasing thieves."

"He's just a little fellow and always has been sheltered in the nest," said Glen. "No wonder he's scared. But this sheriff is too smart a man to take boys along if there was any real danger. We'll have to cheer Sister up."

They reached the car with their can of gasoline just as the sheriff returned. Sister's fright was written in every line of his body as he sat hunched up in the car.

"Be a good idea for one of us to wait around here, in case our friend should double on us and come back, wouldn't it, Mr. Sheriff?" asked Glen.

"First rate idea," agreed the sheriff. "Will you stay?"

"I'd like the ride," said Glen. "Maybe you'd be willing to stay for me, would you, Sister?"

"Whatever you think I can do best," assented Sister, as bravely as possible, though he tumbled out of the car with suspicious alacrity.

"He's little and he's awfully scared," explained Glen to the sheriff.

"I noticed he wasn't sayin' much about it," said the sheriff. "You always want to look out for these scared little fellows who stay by things."

The sheriff's car was a heavy machine designed for rough work, but it covered the ground.

"We'll follow the pike for a while," said the sheriff. "When we come to the crossings, I'll slack up, and you boys keep a sharp lookout for tire tracks."

But the trail was very easy. Not more than four miles out of town they spied the Overfordarrowpack stalled at the side of the road.

"Ran out of gasoline," guessed Glen.

"He's lucky," said the sheriff. "If he'd caught the birds he was after, he'd have reckoned they were hornets."

As they drew up to the car they found Matt chagrined almost to the point of tears. Never had he been so abused in all his aristocratic life.

"They fooled me by lying," he raved. "A boy came to the car with a note. Would I please step

over to a little gully where an old man had slipped and sprained his leg? I went. There was a gully, sure enough, and a deep one. But instead of an old man with a sprained leg, there were two young toughs. One held me and the other took my money and my watch."

"Was that all you lost?" asked the sheriff.

"It's enough, isn't it?" returned Matt. "The watch cost three hundred dollars, and there was a hundred and ten dollars in bills in my pocket."

"That may be, but I don't see why they left what they did. Those sleeve links must be worth most as much as your watch, and your scarfpin even more. You fought some, did you?"

"Yes, I fought some. Knocked out two front teeth for the big one, but I couldn't have done anything if some folks hadn't come along."

"Scared 'em off before they got through, eh?"

"Yes, sir. The two of 'em jumped into a small car and started down this road. I ran back to our car and started after 'em; and here's where the gas gave out."

"Be thankful, boy," said the sheriff. "The only thing that saved you was that they didn't know you were after 'em. If they had, they'd have led you on to some little crossroad and fin-

ished their job. I'll be surprised if they don't try it yet."

"I guess you're right," he agreed. "Can I go on after 'em with you?"

"I'm not going; I have work to do at the fair. With the start those fellows have, and night settling down, they would be pretty hard to chase. I can do better by telephoning their description around and having other people watch for them."

"Well, how about my money and watch?" asked Matt.

"They're both gone," said the sheriff. "Maybe you'll get 'em back, maybe you won't. I don't say it serves you right, but you were mighty foolish to be flashing your money around for every one to see. It's really wicked for any one to send a young boy like you around the country with three-hundred dollar watches and expensive jewelry."

"I'm the one to blame," said Matt. "It never entered my head but that it was all right to carry that watch. The way I happen to have these buttons is that they were already in this shirt when I left home. I always wear this scarfpin."

"You'd better look out, or they'll get it from you, yet," said the sheriff. "You'd better give it to the big fellow to keep."

"I don't want it if it's worth so much," objected Glen. "If I'd supposed those buttons were worth so much, I would have sent you back."

"I'll just hand the stuff over to you, Mr. Sheriff, to keep until we come back this way," said Matt, sensible at last. "If there's any chance of getting my watch and money back, I'm willing to pay a reward."

"I'll offer a small reward," said the sheriff. "It may help in getting hold of your watch, but I guess you've seen the last of your money. Got enough left for a meal ticket?" Glen told the sheriff of their opportunity to work at the dining tent.

"This fellow won't be much good for that to-night," said the friendly sheriff. "I'll give him his supper. There's the little fellow you left on watch."

"Hi, Sister!" called Glen.

"And I'm mighty glad to see you," said Sister. "From what the men said, I was sure that something awful had happened."

"What men, sonny?" asked the sheriff.

"Why, when you'd been gone a little while, two men came up. One of them said 'This was one of

the crowd' and then the other asked me where my partners were.''

''What did you tell them?''

''I said that Matt had run off suddenly, and you fellows had gone to look for him. One of the men said, 'Matt is the young swell, ain't he?' He was an ugly-looking man, and I felt that the best I could do was to give him to understand that Matt wasn't one to trifle with.''

''Had one of them lost any of his teeth?''

''Yes, sir. That was what made him look so funny and so fierce at the same time, I reckon. He had two front teeth out.''

''That settles it,'' said the sheriff. ''Instead of going out that road, they just circled the town. I may pick 'em up yet.''

The boys found their opportunity at the dining tent still open. People were just beginning to occupy the tables for the evening meal. At the scout camp Glen and Chick-chick had acquired experience which now served them well in waiting on the hungry mob that thronged the tent, and even Sister Clark made himself very useful.

Their work was greatly appreciated by the tired proprietor, and when things at last were quiet, he

himself laid an appetizing meal on a big table and sat down to eat with them.

"Where are you boys going?" he asked in a friendly way.

The boys looked to Chick-chick to reply.

"We don't altogether know," said he. "We ought to be within a hundred miles of what we want. Maybe you can help us. We are looking for a Dr. Newton who has a hospital or something of that kind in the Ozarks. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

"No, I don't know any Dr. Newton. There ought to be lots of people here who do, though, for dozens of 'em come from the Ozarks."

"We'll travel on awhile yet," said Chick-chick, "and then begin inquiring for him."

"I'm going to give you boys a quarter apiece, besides your supper," announced the dining boss. "An' I'd like to hire you to help with breakfast at the same rate."

"We're your men," said Chick-chick. "We've got another fellow, too, if you need him. We've got to make a little money to buy gasoline before we can start on our travels."

"I don't know as I want any more help," said the dining-boss. "But I'll tell you what your

partner can do. Let him run your car to and from the depot. It's a mile and a half away, and there ain't near enough jitneys. He can do quite a business at five cents a passenger an' five cents a bag."

The boys looked at one another with interest in their faces.

"We'll try that," said Chick-chick. "I've hauled passengers many a day. Reckon I'd better do it, and let Matty take my place waiting on table."

But Matty, when he came, was inclined strongly to the view that he would shine much more brightly in the capacity of chief engineer of motor transportation than as a humble waiter.

"I think I'm just the man to run the car," he announced.

"And in just about the way you ran one in Kansas City," remarked Sister Clark with an unexpected cut.

Matt did not lose his temper. "That's the only time I ever did such a thing, and it taught me a lesson. I'd lots rather drive than wait on table."

"But I suppose Brick and Chick-chick just love to wait on table," continued Sister, still sarcastic.

"Oh, of course, if you fellows want—" began Matt.

"We don't," said Glen. "But Chick-chick's the engineer, and I think he'd better keep to it. Suppose the Overfordarrowpack started to act up—then you'd have to send in a hurry call for its granddaddy."

"Right enough," agreed Matt. "Dr. Brinkley said that I needed something to take me down a peg or two. I'm surely getting it to-day. First I'm robbed by a couple of country fellows, and then I get a job waiting on them at table."

"Nothing of the kind!" objected Chick-chick. "Most of those I've waited on were nice enough people. Wait till to-morrow an' try it."

They slept on a pile of hay in the rear of the dining tent, and so soundly that nothing disturbed them until a friendly shaking by the proprietor brought them back to life.

"There's a well just outside, where you boys can wash," he said. "Breakfast is just about ready, and we'll eat first. Then we'll get busy."

Chick-chick took the earnings of the preceding night to buy gasoline. It happened that he came up to the gates with his first load of passengers just as there was a lull in the business, and Glen and the dining-boss had time to watch him unload.

"I counted six passengers and ten bags you unloaded," said the dining-boss as Chick-chick stopped for a moment. "You must have made eighty cents that trip."

"No, I made thirty cents," said Chick-chick. "I put out a sign 'Fair Grounds, 5 cents,' and I found they expected their baggage hauled free."

"That's the way all the drivers do, though," said the boss. "They charge extra for the baggage. Can't pay for the gasoline chargin' five cents straight. The people as rides thinks it's a hold-up, but they have to pay."

"That won't do for scouts," objected Chick-chick. "Scouts have to be square. I'm going to change my sign."

In a few minutes he came back with a sign reading, "Fair Grounds, 10 cents. Hand baggage, free. Trunks, 25 cents." "I'm going to try this," he announced.

Twenty minutes later he was back with another load of six people.

"No trouble at all," he announced. "They don't mind paying a fair price, but they want it straight. I'm going back after three trunks that'll make a special load. Say, the fellow who rode

with me told me about that doctor. He says he has a place in the Ozarks, all right, but his name is Newtown."

"Newtown!" exclaimed the dining-boss. "That sounds natural to me. That isn't the name you mentioned. But if it's Doc Newtown, why, I think I can tell you something about him. Wait till after the dinner rush is over."

About two o'clock some tired and hungry boys sat down to eat dinner and compare notes. They had now helped in serving three meals, for which they had received in money two dollars and a quarter. Chick-chick had earned four dollars with his jitney service, and as the fair was breaking camp that afternoon, he was already engaged to haul trunks to the extent of one dollar more. They could therefore take on not only oil and gasoline, but also a good stock of provisions.

"You've done mighty well, boys," the boss congratulated them.

"Thanks to you and your hints," said Glen. "It's surprising, the way people help us along."

"Not a bit of it!" commented the boss. "There's always folks that's willin' to help, and boys that's willin' an' accommodatin' always can find 'em. Why, even this young sport," laying

his hand on Matt's shoulder, "that's been goin' around in a seven-dollar shirt, dishin' pork an' beans to folks 'at never had that much money all at once in their lives, has been jes' as perlite as can be. He's got the stuff in him to make a waiter equal to the best."

Matt's pleasure at this praise was evident.

"My father would like to hear you say that," he said.

"Well, your dad's got a boy that's goin' to make good," asserted the boss. "Now what is it you folks want to know about Doc Newtown and his place?"

"We're going there to look for a friend," said Chick-chick. "How do you get there and what kind of a place is it?"

"I'll have to make you a map to show you how to get there," said the man. "It's putty nigh a hundred mile f'm here. As to what kind of a place it is, why it's funny you don't know, specially if you got a friend there. I s'posed ev'ybody knew Doc Newtown's place, what they calls a 'somat-queerium' is really jest a big, private mad-house!"

The boys looked at one another with consternation written in their faces; in Sister Clark's face,

indeed, there was absolute fear, for to his mind, a madhouse was a place of terror.

"Now, I think I know," exclaimed Chick-chick. "I'm beginning to understand why we can get no news of Apple Newton."

CHAPTER V

"WILD CATS! WOLVES! SAVE ME!"

FORTY miles nearer Newtown Sanatorium; forty miles checked off the rude chart the dining-boss had made for them; and the boys were making camp for the night.

The afternoon was well advanced when they left the fair grounds. They had not expected to complete their journey that night, but to do enough to get there while the next day was still young. It would not be wise to get to a strange place, where their reception was doubtful, just as night was falling. The forty miles of travel had carried them far away from towns, and few indeed were the villages they saw. They were not yet in the Ozarks, but this road ran through an extensive strip of timber quite wild and desolate; and here they prepared to camp.

"It doesn't pay to run on until dark," said Glen, who by common consent was the leader. "We'll camp right here and get busy about it

while we have some daylight. Chick—you lay the stuff out for supper. Matt and Sister, go after water. I'll get the fire ready."

"You've given us the hardest job," grumbled Matt. "Where's there a well? I haven't seen a house for five miles."

"You'll find a stream at the foot of the hill," directed Glen. "I saw a glimpse of it or I wouldn't have called a stop. Sister will show it to you, Matty dear. He has the bucket, already."

Perhaps it was Glen's gibe that put a spirit of spite in Matt's heart. He caught up with Sister Clark in a few steps.

"Don't rush along so swift and careless," he warned. "There may be a wildcat in the bushes."

Sister was scared at the thought, yet he tried a brave smile.

"There isn't any such animal in this country," he said stoutly.

"Oh, there isn't, eh? Of course you know all about it. I just want to tell you I'd hate to risk this road alone after dark."

"You're trying to jolly me, Matt. You know you are," said Sister, his pace lagging in spite of his brave words.

"You won't think I'm jollying if we see one,"

persisted Matt. "You're so little a big wildcat could just about pull you down. Don't you know there are wolves and mountain lions and all sorts of wild beasts in the Ozarks?"

"Honest?"

"Yes, sir. I'm not saying they're common, or that we'll meet any, but they're hunted every year. That's why I picked up this club. I'd like to see the wildcat would do anything to me."

"Say, but I'm glad you're along," exclaimed Sister fervently.

"Oh, I'll look after you," Matt agreed, magnanimously. "Let me have that bucket, now. The water's nice and clear—cool, too. Dip your hands in."

"Let's hurry back, Matt. It's getting dark."

"No. It's just a little gloomy 'cause the timber's thicker."

"Well, they'll be wanting the water. Hurry, Matt."

Chick-chick and Glen had been doing effective work and were quite ready for the water. Soon they had ready a splendid supper.

"Just like old times at scout camp," declared Glen. "You remember the night we camped on Buffalo Mound, Chicken?"

"Do I?" cried Chick-chick. "I should say. I remember the scare I got, too. I was about as scared as Sister, those days."

"I'm not easily scared," protested Sister.

"Not so very, Sister. You're improving a whole lot. Let me see your finger nails."

"Look fellows," he cried, holding up the younger boy's hand. "Sister has finger nails just like a man. Grown out since we left home. First time Sister's had finger nails for years, it is. Been too busy to eat 'em, Sister has. Great! ain't it, Sister. Your mother'll be right proper glad."

"No gladder'n I," asserted Sister. "I'm getting over being nervous. But say, the fire's getting low. Hadn't we better keep it bright to keep the wolves away, Brick?"

"Wolves! This time o' the year? Who ever heard such talk?" cried Glen. "The only time you can sight a wolf around here is when winter starves him out. Get to bed, boy."

All were glad to settle down to rest, for they had worked hard.

"Mind if I lie down here close to you, Brick?" whispered Sister just as Glen had settled down.

"Mighty glad," responded Glen. "You'll be

company. I always like company when I'm camping."

Glen was tired but he lay awake some little time until the regular breathing of the youngster gave assurance of a sound sleep. Then his mind released its grip of his tired senses and he also slept. Perhaps it was hours but it seemed to Glen but a few minutes until he was awakened by a convulsive clutch around his neck and an agonized cry: "Wild cats! Wolves! Wolves! Save me! Mother!"

Glen awoke to the situation in an instant.

"You're all right, Sister," he assured the struggling boy. "I'm right here. There's no such critter. Who said there was?"

"Oh, Matty said so," sobbed the boy. "I can see 'em. Save me."

"You're dreaming, Sister. Quiet down, now. I'm right here; your big brother, Brick Mason. Go to sleep quietly now. We're all safe. God's over us!"

Matt and Chick-chick, old campers, slept through it all without the quiver of an eyelid, and soon Sister passed into quiet slumber.

In the brightness of the early morning everything seemed different. Sister had clear mem-

ories of his troubled night, but wondered if it were not all a dream. Glen had no such thought, and before the day was far advanced he managed a quiet session with Matt which gave that young man his share of the nightmare.

Quite set up with the progress he was making Sister Clark begged the privilege of engineering the car.

"You promised, Chick-chick," he pleaded. "When we reached a road where I couldn't hurt anybody, you said. There's no one travels this road."

"How about us?" objected Chick-chick. "Suppose you run us into a ditch?"

"But I won't," said Sister. "I've watched you every day. I know just how you do it."

"Be a sport, Chicken," chimed in Glen. "I'm willing to take a chance and I know Matty is."

He looked at Matt with emphasis that spoke of their recent interview, and Matt agreed.

Sister Clark at the steering wheel was a picture of animation that would have delighted the heart of his anxious mother and at the same time wrung her soul with anxiety. He got along surprisingly well, however. He had been with Chick-chick for a week now, watching every

maneuver with jealous attention. Perhaps he was gifted with a mechanical sense that compensated for his lack of nerve. Certain it is that he solved the problems of shifting gears on the hills, applying brakes, giving enough gas and not too much, in a way that carried the car along at a nice speed.

Twenty miles they traveled safely and well, to the great delight of Sister Clark and the amazement of Chick-chick. And then—a disaster that none could foresee and the driver could not prevent.

They had reached a turning in a rather dense bit of woodland. The roadside was all grown up with brush, the turn so abrupt that no one could see two feet beyond it.

"Keep to the side and honk your horn, Sister," warned Chick-chick. "I don't suppose there ever was another car on this road, I don't. But—"

And just then came the unforeseen. Just as they nosed cautiously around the bend came an approaching menace in the form of an old style auto-buggy of the vintage of 1902, rushing along at its top speed, making at least ten miles an hour, and stealing the whole road to get a good swing on the turn. Chick-chick, sitting on the outer seat was the first one to glimpse the car. Without a

word he reached quickly over, shutting off the engine with one hand while with the other he seized the steering wheel and twisted the nose of the Overfordarrowpack straight for the brush. Sister, terrified though he was, managed to jam on both foot and emergency brakes.

The cars came together with a mild crash, the Overfordarrowpack taking the impact broadside on. Had the onslaught come from a heavy, powerful car, it would have worked havoc, but as it was, the auto-buggy seemed to suffer most. Its two occupants were thrown forward into the laps of Matt and Glen in the rear seat; and as the buggy recoiled from the impact, its engine dead, several of its parts scattered into the road. Chick-chick's sturdy car seemed little the worse, save for a dented fender.

"Rather hasty way you fellows get in," said Glen, seeing the intruders were unhurt.

"Hasty!" cried the older boy. "Hasty. What d'ye mean running a car on this road? We never saw one before."

"We tried to give you room," Chick-chick defended himself. "If this is a private road we didn't know it."

"Oh, it ain't so private. Some stranger comes

along every month or so. But who's to reckon you'd be so thick just at this bad turn?"

"If that's an apology, we accept it," said Chick-chick. "Our valuable car seems to have suffered most in her rear fender. We can fix it."

"Yes, but look at ours!"

"It seems to have offered its resignation," remarked Chick-chick. "But you can't hurt those old timers much, you can't. Chain drive, ain't she? Well, your chain's no stronger'n its weakest link and that's lyin' in the dust. See. I'll help you fix it, I will."

"You're surely good, after our running into you an' all. Not much like the brigands we were running away from."

"Brigands! Where? Any such critters on this peaceful road we want to know."

"You better look out for 'em. They didn't come in on this road. We met 'em about five miles away. They have a little runabout. Stopped us to borrow some tape. One of em, he looked so funny, Lafe here, my brother, wanted to take his picture. You see he had his camera 'cause we're going to visit my uncle."

"An' say," broke in Lafe, "I hadn't more'n picked it up an' pointed it at that queer lookin'

chap afore they broke loose. Why, you'd think picture-takin' was a crime."

"What did they do?"

"Started to smash us. Lucky we were on a down grade and our engine running. We slipped right into high gear and used our wings. We'd been goin' yet if you fellows had kept out of our way. Tell you, they're ugly customers. Stay away from 'em."

"How many are there?" asked Glen.

"Only two. But they're meaner'n all four of you fellows."

"Say," put in Matt, with a sudden inspiration, "what made the man look so odd that you wanted a picture?"

"Oh, he was shy two front teeth and had one eye half closed. He just looked comical. I wouldn't have tried for his picture if I'd supposed he'd notice."

"It's the fellows from the fair," guessed Chick-chick. "They're lookin' after Matty's sleeve links, they are."

"They'll be sorry," declared Matt. "Let's go after 'em an' get my watch."

"No, we won't," said Glen. "We'll keep out

of their way. I'm going to get these fellows to mail a card to that sheriff, though."

"But I want my watch," insisted Matt.

"They aren't likely carrying it around," said Glen. "We're sorry about the watch, Matt; but the job we're on is too important to take risks. If these boys will show us, we'll turn off so as to avoid their road."

Chick-chick had put the old auto-buggy in running shape and the boys were glad to give directions.

"How do you suppose they ever came to follow us?" asked Sister, who had given up the wheel to Chick-chick.

"Probably they sent some one to find out from the dining-boss where we were headed," suggested Chick-chick. "They likely feel as if there must be some more nuts to get if they shake the tree, they do."

Matt started up with a vengeful look, but Glen pulled him back to his seat.

"Don't talk to the man at the wheel," he ordered. "We've lost enough time already. We don't want to be reaching that asylum just at dark."

The boys kept a sharp lookout for the little roadster and its two occupants and once or twice sighted such a car in the distance but never close enough to identify the occupants. Probably the thieves supposed their prey to be on ahead and were hurrying to overtake them.

It was four o'clock in the evening when they arrived at the little town of Pittsville near which the Sanatorium was located. Directions as to entrance were obtained without difficulty and it was still broad daylight when, their hearts beating high with hope and anxiety, they stood on the broad graveled driveway in front of the Newtown Sanatorium, waiting the coming of the doctor, that they might demand of him the person of their chum, Apple Newton.

CHAPTER VI

THE WRONG PLACE

"BUT you can't possibly be Doctor Newtown!"

It was Chick-chick speaking. His face was a study in apprehension and dismay—apprehension lest he were being cheated—dismay at the prospect that their long journey had served only to bring them to the wrong place.

"I certainly am Doctor Newtown," said the pleasant faced gentleman, "and this is Newtown Hospital."

"Then it isn't the place we want at all," groaned Chick-chick. "I couldn't be mistaken about Doctor Newton."

"Perhaps I can explain your difficulty," suggested the doctor. "There is a Doctor Newton who conducts a sanatorium for the treatment of nervous diseases. His place is in the Ozarks but not in this neighborhood. His name is Newton, mine is Newtown."

"Yes, it is Doctor Newton we are after. Can you direct us to his place?"

"You entered the Ozarks at the wrong point for his place. You will have to go back on your track about forty miles, and then swing around perhaps seventy or eighty if you follow the main road. There is another wagon road that is usually good this time of year that makes a straight cut through the woods, and does it in about forty miles. However, I can't promise but that you may wish you had taken the hundred and twenty miles of level road."

"There's just one question," said Chick-chick. "Is it possible to run a car over this mountain road?"

"I can't tell you," replied the genial doctor. "Wagons go over it."

"Our Overfordarrowpack can do everything but climb trees," asserted Chick-chick. "Where a wagon goes it can go. We'll be on our way."

"Not to-night," objected the doctor. "I can see that you boys are terribly disappointed and very tired. There's nothing like a good meal to put heart into you and get you ready for a new fight. We'll have dinner ready for you in no time."

The good man had the genial southern hospi-

tality that considers every wayfarer a guest. Although in no way responsible for their dilemma he assumed without hesitation the burden of helping them, and the first step was food.

An attendant conducted them to an outhouse where they found running water, soap and towels. This gave them great refreshment, and quickened their appetite for the hearty meal spread for them in the great, clean kitchen adjoining.

"This is a splendid man," said Chick-chick, straightening up with a satisfied smile after his meal. "I wish he were Apple's uncle. But, if so, Apple wouldn't need any relief expedition."

The boys declined lodging accommodations other than some hay which they threw down by the side of the car, and upon which they slept soundly. They were up bright and early next morning, and were just preparing to cook their own breakfast when the doctor appeared.

"Nonsense, boys," he protested. "Save your provisions for your need. We prepare oatmeal by the boilerful and cook eggs and bacon on a sheet-iron raft. Come on in and get some. To-day's Sunday. What ye going to do?"

"It's a day of rest for us," replied Glen.

"Good boys," said the doctor. "We have serv-

ices in our chapel at ten o'clock. After that, I'll take you through our institution.''

When the time came to follow the doctor through the buildings with the barred windows the three older boys were keen with interest, but Sister Clark dragged his footsteps with a visible effort, his face paler than usual and the old frightened look back in his eyes.

''You come right along with me, Sister,'' cried Glen. ''I want you at my side every minute, not a foot away. If any of the guards try to keep me in there, I want you to take firm hold of my hand, and say, 'He's all right. That's just his natural expression and he can't help it. He's with our party.' ''

In the laughter Sister Clark forgot some of his terror, but he ranged up alongside Glen, quite willing to take him at his word.

Not one of the boys had ever visited a hospital for the insane nor had they recived any instruction about the present day conduct of such institutions. Their minds were filled with vague thoughts of padded cells, maniacs, dragging at chains, barred cages, restraining wild creatures in strait-jackets, and the other features of horror of past ages, that had lingered in their minds from

miscellaneous reading. The three older fellows looked forward to the visit in eager anticipation, but Sister held it in such dread that he scarce could conceal his terror.

Great, therefore, was his relief to find that his visions were all a mistake. Instead of the barred cages and the padded cells, they walked through pleasant halls and along quiet corridors. Men and women sat there, some playing games, some reading, some in conversation and others merely staring at the visitors, or sitting with faces averted as if objecting to the inspection. There were many with abnormal looks or going through strange contortions of body, some who sprang forward to attract the doctor's attention and insist upon saying wild things, others who sat dumbly blank as if dead to the world; but the whole scene gave to them the thought which was to remain through life, that insane persons were people who were sick rather than "mad" and were to be dealt with in the greatest tenderness and care, as were the inmates of this place.

"Where are the dangerous ones, Doctor?" Matt's curiosity led him to ask at last.

"There aren't so very many that are dangerous, after they have been here a little while and have

become used to our ways and we to theirs. We no longer find it necessary to restrain them with chains and cages as in days past. When a patient has a wild spell we usually give a bath treatment. This doesn't mean a cleansing bath such as you take, but a prolonged bath, for quieting effect, lasting for hours. Our bath plant is among the most effective of our means of cure, and we are quite proud of it."

He led them into a great room containing all manner of devices for bathing, from the ordinary needle shower to a large electric cabinet. Lying on narrow tables were several patients snugly encased in wet packs and blankets. A youthful attendant, scarcely larger than Matt, was busy about the bulky frame of a heavy patient, handling him with great dexterity and deft touch.

"Takes some skill and strength to do that," remarked the doctor.

"Oh, I think I could do it," said Matt, always self confident.

"Try it," suggested the doctor. "This man getting out of the tub is ready for the pack. The attendant will show you how."

One thing to be said for Matt Burton was that he never shirked anything. The patient offered

no resistance. Matt, his face red at first with confusion, and later with effort, stepped to the table and followed the directions of the attendant.

"It's no snap," he admitted, as he stepped away and straightened his shoulders. "But it's a fine thing to feel you can do such things and make people better that way."

"You did fine," said the attendant. "A little practice and you'd make a good hand."

This ended their tour, and Sister breathed a great sigh of relief as they stood once more in the open air.

"It's worth seeing just for the sympathy it gives you for them," he said. "But I'm glad we're going to be on our way to-morrow morning. I think I'll enjoy the Ozarks better."

After much discussion and many inquiries about the mountain road, they had decided to risk the short cut, and, early in the morning, were ready for the road.

"We'll make it," declared Chick-chick. "We may have to get out and push once in a while, but with a strong man like Matty in the crowd, what of that?"

"If you let me run the car there'll be no need for pushing," retorted Matt.

"I'm in favor of Sister driving," suggested Glen. "I'd like to have a sure hand at the wheel on this expedition."

But Chick-chick was already seated.

"You fellows climb in here and stop your fussing," he ordered. "We have forty miles to go as the crow flies, and ten times up and down as the beetle crawls. This Overford is snorting to get away this minute."

For ten miles they traveled a reasonably solid though somewhat flinty road.

"It's a little hard on tires," Chick-chick admitted. "However, so long as we're saving some eighty miles I guess we can stand it."

Then the road became more mountainous, leading them through a wildly beautiful country. At times it wound along a narrow gulch with high bluffs overhanging; at others it climbed up, up, up, threading a way between trees of pine and white oak until it seemed the ascent would have no end. Then would come the descent, and the Overfordarrowpack, though held back by its engine and its brakes, would yet come down some places at a tumble. Twice they crossed the river, and the second time in fear and trembling, for there was no bridge and Chick-chick admitted that

his beloved car could not swim and never before had depended solely upon its "ford" qualities.

The day wore along. They felt sure that two-thirds of the trip had been covered. Everything seemed moving as merrily as a picnic party. Then, on a steep down grade, without a second's warning, a sharp explosion told of a tire blow-out, and in spite of Chick-chick's frantic efforts, the car bolted for a deep ditch at the side of the road and over they went.

Glen, almost unhurt, sprang up and looked anxiously around.

"How is it, fellows?" he shouted. "Are you all right?"

"Sister's right down here by me," replied Chick-chick. "I think he's fainted. I'm all right, only the way my right leg feels it must be in three pieces."

"I'll get over and help you in a minute," called Matt. "I didn't do a thing but a double flip. Came right on my feet."

Glen and Matt climbed over to their two comrades.

"Say, that knee hurts like sixty," ejaculated Chick-chick. "Same one I twisted playing football. Sister's waking up. You all right, Sister?"

"Sure thing," asserted Sister, bravely. "But, say, where am I? What's happened?"

After all it seemed that Chick-chick was the chief sufferer. His right knee was already greatly swollen and giving him great pain. He made little complaint and seemed chiefly concerned about getting the car out of the ditch, which was only accomplished after several hours of hard labor and the use of an improvised pulley, all of which work Chick-chick directed but could not stir to assist.

"Wind shield smashed, two bows of top broken, fender buckled, tire gone out, we can fix all that," Chick-chick rapidly inventoried the damages. "Here's our worst trouble—steering gear on the blink. Got to have new steering knuckle, sure. Remember that little place with repair shop. Who'll go back after repairs?"

"I'll go," volunteered Glen. "It's so late now that I won't promise to get back to-night, but I'll be here first thing in morning."

"I'll go along," offered Matt.

Sister and Chick-chick watched them go, regretfully.

"Knee hurt much?" asked Sister.

"Doesn't feel any too good. I'll change this compress if you'll get some fresh water."

"Sure. Where did Brick get it?"

"There's a spring over there a ways—he said a tremendous walnut tree stood there—the only one."

Sister took a pail and disappeared through the trees, whistling cheerfully, and Chick-chick lying on his back trying to convince himself that his knee did not ache, did not think for one instant that the boy he watched out of sight would be seen no more for very many dreary weeks.

Every moment he expected Sister to return lugging a heavy pail. Half an hour he waited. Through an improvised megaphone he bawled through the quiet woods: "Sister! Sister! Oh, Sister Clark!"

Another half hour pased. Then in spite of the lacerating pain he crawled to a tree, cut a rude staff, and started to find the spring.

CHAPTER VII

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SISTER CLARK

IN all that solitude of the Ozarks the only sign of human life that Chick-chick could see was the cap that Sister Clark had worn and some trampled footsteps around a somewhat muddied spring.

Sister had gone. Chick-chick was alone. Alone in the Ozarks with a disabled knee that would not suffer him to go in search of any one. It was not the pain of his injuries that troubled him. What had become of Sister Clark? That was the question. What should he say to the boy's mother? What could have happened? Pshaw! It wasn't likely that anything bad had happened on this lovely, quiet September day. There were houses within a mile or two, perhaps nearer. If he had wandered away there would be people to direct him back to the road.

Partly satisfied with this reasoning, Chick-chick stooped to pick up the cap. As he did so he saw a button lying in the grass. He picked it up. It

was a peculiar button. Adherent to it was a piece of cloth, just as might have come away if jerked hastily from a garment. What did that mean? The day being warm, Sister had worn no coat, only a light, buttonless jersey.

Chick-chick sat down by the spring and thought until his aching head refused further duty. Then he limped back up the slope and painfully picked his way to the Overfordarrowpack, carrying a small supply of water.

The dark of evening began to fill the sky. All through the afternoon Chick-chick had cherished the hope of Sister's sudden appearance with some story of his wanderings. Now he gave it up. He did not care to eat. He dragged the cushions of the car into a semblance of a bed and there he lay through a drearily long night. The ache in his knee was intolerable. No change of position rested it, yet he was obliged to try every few minutes. When morning dawned, Chick-chick had passed through the longest night of his existence.

He cared nothing for breakfast. This boy—William Clark—was in his care. He was responsible for him. He must give an accounting to his mother. What should he say? How could he tell her?

Once more he dragged himself down to the little spring, but when he reached there he was so exhausted by pain and weakness that he could make but little in the way of a search. It was an inexpressible relief to hear the clear call of Buffalo Troop which told him that Glen and Matt had returned.

He gave an answering yodel which led the boys to him.

"What ye dragging that bad leg down here for?" asked Matt. "Where's Sister?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," answered Chick-chick, very solemnly. "Sister left me to get water, just after you fellows went away, and I haven't seen him since."

"Honest?" cried Matt, incredulous.

"Sister away alone all night!" exclaimed Glen.

"It's true," affirmed Chick-chick. "My knee felt pretty bad and I asked him to go for water. When he didn't come back in half an hour I hollered for him. Then about half an hour later I crawled down here but all I could find was his cap, and this button lying by it."

"What could have become of the boy?" queried Glen.

"I've been worrying it over ever since he left,

Brick, and I don't know much more than I did then. All the afternoon I hoped every minute he'd come bursting out o' the bushes with some tale of chasing a bird or rabbit or something. I couldn't do a thing to search for him, for I can't put my foot to the ground yet. This morning I crawled down here again. Seems to me there's too many tracks around this spring. Here are Sister's and over here those of two different big fellows."

"One of them I made yesterday," said Glen. "See how my foot fits into this."

"Well, the other leads up the hill into the woods, and so does Sister's."

Glen and Matt followed the fresh trail with eager eyes, having little difficulty in picking it up in the soft earth which prevailed generally beneath the trees. They came back in a short time.

"It goes about a hundred yards," said Matt. "After that the big man's track keeps on into the woods, but Sister's disappears entirely. There's no cave and no sign of any balloon ascension. He had to go somewhere. Where did he go?"

"Went with the man," answered Chick-chick, promptly. "I'm just guessing, but I've had all night to make my guess and this is it. Those two thieves from the fair grounds have followed us.

One of 'em saw Sister at the spring. They had quite a tussle and Sister pulled the button off his coat, he did. Then they started to the woods. Sister couldn't or wouldn't travel, so the man threw him over his shoulder and carried him off."

"But why'd they want Sister?" asked Glen. "If it had been Matt, your guess might be all right. But they'd gain nothing by carrying Sister off."

"I thought of that, too," explained Chick-chick. "Maybe they figured that if they couldn't get Matty, Sister was the next best. He's neat, Sister is; takes care of himself, he does. When he left me yesterday he looked a lot more like a child of wealth than Matty does this minute."

Matt did not resent the statement, being indeed rather proud of it.

"Enough of guessing," declared Glen. "We must do something. We brought your steering fixtures, Chicken. We'll help you back to the car, and while you do what work you can, Matty and I will find houses and make inquiries."

Chick-chick had managed to get the car ready for the road again, when at last the two boys returned, hot, dusty, and disappointed.

"We've walked about twelve miles and found

two houses," said Matt. "They haven't seen a thing of him."

"We discovered one important thing, though," added Glen. "The road to Doctor Newton's is good from here on, and not more than ten miles, the man said. There's a town near there. I hate to desert Sister, but we must go after help. Let's push along to Doctor Newton's as fast as we can."

It seemed the only thing to do. Aimless searching was a dangerous waste of time. At Doctor Newton's they could get the help of those familiar with the country and organize a real search.

"You're forgetting just one thing," suggested Chick-chick. "If this Doctor Newton is like what I think, he won't help us about Sister any more than about Apple, he won't."

This reflection was indeed a wet blanket, but the boys were not wholly discouraged. Thoughts of the genial Doctor Newtown gave them hope that the doctor whose name was so similar would have a certain measure of his kindness. Then the day was bright, the road was fairly good, the little car acted with wonderful precision, Chick-chick's knee felt better, and the rosy anticipations of youth grew within them in spite of misfortune.

Surely that group of buildings in the distance

was the fateful sanatorium, surely Apple Newton was somewhere within its walls and would be speedily yielded up to them, surely they would find Sister Clark once a guide was secured, and in scarcely any time they would be on their way home, victorious.

Hope filled their hearts, and their pulses beat high with excitement as the car ran in between two massive columns of granite and along an avenue shaded by parallel rows of stately oaks.

So hospitable had been their reception at the Newtown Hospital and so kind the references made by Doctor Newtown to his brother physician, that the boys were encouraged to hope for a very cordial reception from the doctor whom they now were approaching. Notwithstanding the fact that Chick-chick had received such a poor impression of his character, they hoped that he would take them into his full confidence about Apple Newton. But their anticipations were chilled by the first words of the nurse who came to the door.

"This is a very busy time," she said abruptly. "Visiting hours begin at two o'clock."

"We aren't just visitors," explained Chick-chick, as boldly as possible. "We came to see about Corliss Newton."

The woman's face softened.

"He was a nice boy," she said. "But you'll have to ask the doctor. I'll call him."

Doctor Newton answered the description given by Chick-chick to perfection. He came to the hall in a tremendous hurry, greatly disturbed that his time should be broken in upon. His time was very valuable, he would have the boys to know; he had very little of it to spend in idle discussion.

"Corliss was our very dear friend," said Glen, usurping Chick-chick's position as spokesman for a moment.

Doctor Newton gave him a sharp glance. Then he began a somewhat more detailed explanation.

"The boy was very ill almost as soon as he got here," he explained. "He was a source of trouble to me from the very start. His disease was pernicious malaria—something that seems to belong exclusively to these southern countries. He raved in delirium a great deal, but we thought little of that, and as his fever dropped, and he began to eat again I expected he would soon be well. I noticed, however, that his speech centers were disturbed. He could not seem to remember names. Then we found that this illness seemed to have destroyed all recollection of his previous

identity. About two months ago he disappeared. I would have you young men to understand that I left my hospital in the hands of subordinates an entire week while I directed a search. It was useless! That's the story. What more can any one do?"

The doctor listened in gloomy silence while Chick-chick told of their trip and of Sister Clark's disappearance. He said nothing until the story wound up with an appeal for help and a guide.

"What will be gained?" he asked. "You will go back into the hills and another will get lost. Meantime I shall be wearing myself out in a fruitless hunt and my sanatorium, the outcome of a lifetime of hard work, will be going to rack and ruin."

"We don't ask you to come," said Chick-chick. "All we ask is your help."

"Why did you come here?" cried the doctor. "It was foolish in the extreme. What can you boys do that I have not done? I have already lost a week. It is ruinous. This work that I am doing means restored health to scores of persons every year. I cannot allow it to be injured for one boy."

"It need not be injured," insisted Chick-chick. "All we want of you is a man who knows the

country well and will act as a guide. Surely you have such a man among your employees."

"But I need him. I have such a man. He was raised here and has been over the country in all seasons of the year. But he is one of my best men in the bath house. I need him."

"But you need Corliss Newton, your nephew, too, don't you?" asked Glen.

"But Corliss is dead," said the doctor, in softened tones. "If he were not, I should have heard by now. You boys cannot find Corliss."

"We want to try," said Glen Mason. "We came all the way from home because of the firm conviction we feel that our old friend Corliss is alive and needs our help. We must have a guide if only to hunt for the boy we have lost from our expedition. I am strong. Let me stay here and work in the place of your bath attendant, and send him out with these two on our search."

Doctor Newton looked him up and down and a yielding look softened the hard lines of his face. He was about to accept the proposition when Matt Burton stepped to the front.

"I am the one to stay here and do that work, Doctor Newton," he said. "I tried it at Doctor Newtown's hospital and they said I showed a

knack for it. I am strong enough. Mason is needed for the search. No one can take his place. Tell your man to show me how to go to work, and let the guide and these two fellows get started."

It was not easy, this sacrifice that Matt offered. He wanted very much to go on the search. He did not want to stay to do this hard work. But Matt had learned some lessons of late. There was born in him a growth of true nobility that led him to see that the greatest service he could give was to suppress his selfish desires and take the humble part.

"Go along, Brick," he said, seeing the doubt in Glen's face. "I can do this work, and they'll need you before our boys are found."

And one hour later, Matt Burton stood and watched the expedition into the woods.

CHAPTER VIII

INTRODUCING WILLIAM GRUBB

IT was not in nature that two Boy Scouts, especially such Scouts as Glen Mason and Chick-chick, should travel long with a boy and let him remain a stranger.

Dr. Newton did not even wait to introduce the youth who was to be guide to the boys in their search for Sister Clark and Apple Newton. He simply brought him to the group and hurried away to his precious work, allowing them to become acquainted as best they might.

"We're mighty glad to have you with us," said Glen. "I'm Glen Mason, very often called Brick for short—"

"Nothing of the kind," interrupted Chick-chick. "He's called Brick partly because he is one, and partly from his lurid thatch, he is. I'm Henry Henry."

"What do they call you for short?" asked the guide.

"We call him Chick-chick," answered Glen, glad

to get even. "But it isn't because he is one, nor on account of his feathers. What is your name?"

"Grubb!" replied the boy.

"But your real name," said Glen.

"That's it. William Grubb. I'm commonly called Grubbsey, because I haven't reached the butterfly stage yet."

"Do you live in this country all the time?"

"Most of it. I was born twenty-five miles from here, but my folks aren't the hill-billy kind. They were living there because my father had T. B. and was trying to get his health. He died some time later. I haven't lived here all the time, though. I've been to medical college in Chicago one year and I'm now earning money to go again."

"Good boy," said Chick-chick. "Matty thinks he's goin' be doctor, too. So does poor old Apple. You'll be great bunch. It'll be awful risky thing anybody get sick. You know anything 'bout doctorin' sick car?"

"Not a thing," replied Will Grubb. "Can't even make a diagnosis."

"'Tain't necessary do that," said Chick-chick. "Can do that myself. Leaky lung—all air gone—underpneumonia! Can ye work a hand pump?"

"I surely can."

"That's boy. I'll fix tire, then we'll take turns pumpin' it up in three turns; one for you, one for Brick, and one for you two."

"What do you do?"

"I supply the atmosphere. Take it from anywhere in this area. Get busy now, fellows."

"We're ready," said Glen. "We must get the old Overfordarrowpack tinkered up, and let's see how soon this guide can strike a hot trail. But while we pump this tire, you hurry down the street and send a message to Matt Burton's people to send us some help. Maybe his uncle will come down. We'll come on down as soon as ready and get you and the other gas at the same time."

"I'll be waiting for you," said Chick-chick.

"He seems to be a nice, friendly fellow," said Grubb, as Chick-chick disappeared. "He was clever fixing this tire, too."

"He's clever at anything," said Glen. "He put this car together without help from any one, and he can do marvels. Even without proper tools, he is a dandy at making things go right."

"How did this boy get lost—this boy you want me to help you find?"

"We want you to help us find *two* boys—did you know that?"

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"No. I just heard there was a boy who came with you and got lost in the woods."

"That's only half of our trouble. You see we started down here for the particular purpose of finding our old chum, Apple Newton."

"The doctor's nephew that was here and went out of his head when he was sick?"

"That's the one. He is a Scout, a member of our Troop. He promised to keep us posted how he got along. When he didn't write and didn't write and our letters didn't get answered we were mighty uneasy. Then Chick-chick got a letter from this Doctor Newton to say the boy had disappeared.

"He didn't seem to be doing anything to find him, and it didn't look good to us, so Chick-chick, who was his special chum, started an expedition after him."

"The doctor did try to find him," said Grubb. "He made what he thought was a big effort. What I can't understand is how he was ever content to quit."

"Well, we didn't like it and we are here to search until we find where he is," said Glen. "We brought with us a boy named Clark. He is a mighty good little chap, but he has been babied too

much in his early years and some one tagged him with the nickname 'Sister.' ''

"He's the boy you lost, is he?"

"Yes, but it isn't through any fault of his. One of us rather foolishly drew the attention of a gang of toughs back at a county fair we stopped at, and made them think we were rich boys with a lot of money and other valuables. They followed us and we feel pretty sure that they have kidnapped 'Sister' thinking they can get some money out of it. We want to follow them up."

"I think we can find the boy," said Grubb. "The kidnappers may be sorry they ever got into this country. Unless they know it pretty well, they may get lost themselves."

"Think so? That might be bad for them and bad for Sister Clark, too. What kind of a country is it?"

"Oh, it's all kinds. You would hardly call any of the hills mountains, but some of them are very steep and almost inaccessible to any one who doesn't know the trails. Then there is a lot of brush everywhere that is pretty hard to get through. A few wagon trails lead through it, but in lots of places you can't even get through on foot."

"I've heard there are caves, too. Isn't the great Mammoth Cave somewhere near here?"

"No. That is in Kentucky. There is quite a celebrated cave in the Ozarks called Marvel Cave. It is quite a distance from here but we may get to it before we are through with this hunt. Small caves are quite common. And there are high bluffs and chasms and one or two underground streams and all kinds of interesting things."

"Later on I hope to get to see some of them," said Glen. "Just now what we want before anything else is to find the boys. Get in if you're ready and we'll start down to the village to pick up Chick-chick and get our gasoline."

Chick-chick had attended to his business at the telegraph office and was waiting for them.

"Thought ye might had some trouble," he said. "Never feel real easy 'bout this baby engine if I don't run her myself, I don't."

"Don't you be afraid," Glen assured him. "This little car knows my touch as well as she does yours. What did you do while you waited?"

"Interviewed some of the natives. One of 'em told me be careful how we go around these hills. Said the place we're going is the Nancy Hill Country where most every native is a moonshiner

and every stranger that comes is suspected as a revenue officer.''

''I guess they'll know that we boys are too young for that,'' said Glen.

''I'm not so sure about it,'' observed the guide. ''You don't look so very young. But I'm known to quite a few of the hill folk, so you'll have to let me introduce you.''

''Where shall we go first?''

''We'd better go back the way you came. From what you say, you came through the Red Gap—''

''I didn't say so,'' said Chick-chick. ''I don't know anything about any Red Gap.''

''No. But those red gravel hills you told about can't be anything but the Red Gap, and that's about the only way you could come. We'll go back there and get started. I think you must have been up along Horseshoe Fork.''

It was growing dark when the boys reached the spot which they recognized as the place where Chick-chick had stayed all night waiting for a chance to search for Sister Clark.

''No good trying for any further to-night,'' said Grubb. ''We'll camp here.''

He showed the scouts that he knew enough about camp craft to qualify as a First Class Scout.

They had a very satisfactory supper and then lay down upon beds of springy branches to chat by their camp fire.

"I'm glad to see you fellows going into this hunt so keen," said Grubb. "There's lots of people wouldn't do it. This boy Corliss Newton isn't any kin to any of you, is he?"

"Not blood kin," said Glen. "But I don't know that blood kin is the only kind. I'd do as much for him as for my own brother. He and his father did a lot for me."

"And for me," added Chick-chick, in a voice shaky with emotion.

They lay in the silence of the quiet evening without a word being said for two or three minutes. Only the crackling of the fire and the occasional rustling of some wild thing stealing through the underbrush disturbed the silence of the woods.

"If it isn't anything too confidential," said Grubb suddenly, "I wish you would tell me about what this boy did for you fellows to make you feel so toward him."

"It's a long story," replied Glen. "It goes back to the beginning of things for me. It wasn't only Apple but his father, Captain Newton, our

old Scoutmaster, that helped us. If you want to lie awake for half an hour I'd just as soon tell you the story."

"I don't know anything I'd rather listen to," said Grubb.

CHAPTER IX

BRICK MASON'S STORY

"I HAVE to begin by telling you about myself," said Glen. "It's a part of my life that I'm not a bit proud of, but I tell it sometimes just to help other fellows. When I was fourteen years old I was in the Reform School. Never mind how I got there. It was my own fault. My father was dead. My mother was broken-hearted and had to take care of my little sister and brother without my help. The reform school didn't do me much good because I was always a rebel all the time I was there. When I was fifteen I broke away and got safely off."

"Somebody in that Reform School didn't know how to treat boys right," interrupted Chick-chick. "You were good enough fellow when we got hold of you."

"Was I?" asked Glen. "You are forgetting a few things. Remember how you thought I'd killed Matty?"

"Yes, and I remember how Matty thought he'd found the treasure and how you two got fighting in the hole he dug. But that doesn't lay it all on you."

"Well, anyway, I was generally down and out, when I had the good fortune to run into a gentleman named Will Spencer, a man I soon found to be one of the biggest men God ever made, though at the time I met him, he thought himself to be only half a man because he had no legs. Mr. Spencer hired me to take him on a search for some treasure. While searching we found a camp of Boy Scouts under the care of Captain Newton, Apple's father, who was the Scoutmaster."

"And the best Scoutmaster that ever trained a gang of unruly boys," said Chick-chick, reverently.

"It was in that Camp that I found Chick-chick, and Matt Burton, and Apple Newton and a lot of other fine fellows."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Grubb. "You said you went out to hunt for treasure. I'm mighty curious to know if you found it."

"Yes, we found it. All kinds of treasure. It's told about in a book called 'The Boy Scout Treasure Hunters.'"

"Did you get a share of it?"

"Yes. More money than I ever had in my life. But a bigger thing for me was meeting Captain Newton and the Boy Scouts and getting my life straightened up so I was anxious to do something and be somebody."

"How did you do that?"

"Oh, a good many ways. Nobody could be with a man like Captain Newton and not be better for it. And his boy Corliss—we always called him Apple for a nickname—is just about like him. They did so much for me that I can't begin to pay them back, but I'm mighty glad to have this chance to do just a little bit for them."

"You did something for yourself, too," insisted Chick-chick. "And you did one thing even Captain Newton couldn't do. Matt Burton had been with Captain Newton quite a while but he never did amount to much until you took the conceit out of him."

"I think the outlaws who robbed the bank were the ones who got Matty started right," said Glen.

"No. He was just as bad after that. It was when he nearly got drowned in the flooded cave and you dived in and pulled him out."

"I don't know. I don't claim any credit for

Matty. It was just that he had been having one thing after another hammered into him by Captain Newton and the Scouts, and about the time we were there on our treasure hunt he was about ripe for a change. So we had the fun of putting on the finishing touches."

"For that matter Matty isn't any angel yet," said Chick-chick.

"No, and neither are you nor I, let's hope," said Glen. "On the other hand, we would be mighty poor sticks if we weren't any better and wiser for all we went through in the treasure hunt."

"And this Mr. Spencer?" asked Will Grubb. "How did he get along and what became of him?"

"Well, he got enough money out of the treasure hunt to go back east to one of the best hospitals in the country and get some artificial legs that he can actually walk with. He doesn't even need crutches, only a cane. He is a big real estate dealer now, and one of the best friends the Boy Scouts ever had."

"Are you still Boy Scouts?"

"We surely are. We are members of the very same troop, too. I live a long way from troop headquarters, but I always manage to attend the summer camp. We have the finest camp in our

part of the country at Buffalo Lake. There's a dandy club-house there that is called the Bread Box in memory of our old days, and we meet there every summer and have a great time. But we have changed in some things. Our old Scoutmaster who did so much for us, Captain Newton, has reported Up Above, and when we met this year we supposed that Apple Newton, his son, was safe with his uncle."

"You must have been in camp about the time he broke away and was wandering around, out of his head."

"Probably. Chick-chick was uneasy about not hearing from him even at that time. Then when he got word that the boy had wandered off he started our expedition to search for him."

"And we're a goin' to find him," added Chick-chick, emphatically.

"We surely will," said Will Grubb.

"I'm glad we got you for a guide," remarked Glen. "You are just the fellow we need. If you were a year or two younger we would make a Scout out of you. As it is, you'll have to be a Scoutmaster."

Will Grubb dropped off to sleep, fully enlisted in the cause of the Scouts. He was very glad now

that he had consented to leave his work and come with them. He knew of only one troop of Boy Scouts in the surrounding country. He had heard good reports of them, and his acquaintance with these boys revived his interest.

"If being a Scout can change a Reform School boy into the kind of a fellow Mason is now, there must be a lot to it," he thought. "As Mason says, I'm too old to be a Scout, but I may yet have to be a Scoutmaster."

The boys were all up at the first break of day and anxious to eat breakfast and get an early start.

"It was scarcely two days ago since the boy you call Sister Clark was carried off, and you say that the kidnappers started from this place?" said Grubb. "That ought to give us a pretty fair chance."

"It ought to. But you must remember that we searched all around here pretty thoroughly yesterday morning."

"We'll do it again," said Grubb. "And I'll go around to two or three houses where I am known and see what I can find out."

It was noon before they met again. It had been an unusually hot day for that season of the year

and each one of them showed the effects of the hard travel as well as disappointment.

"I simply have not found a solitary thing that is new," reported Chick-chick. "I didn't start as early as you fellows because I had to do a little fixing on my engine and find a good, safe place to leave her. But so far as getting any results my time's wasted. How about you, Will Grubb?"

"Nothing very promising," said Grubb. "I found one house where I know the people pretty well. The people around here are an honest lot and don't do any moonshining but they're awfully afraid of 'rev'noos' just the same. You see they know that their neighbors a little deeper in the hills are guilty and pretty desperate, too. And they're afraid that if they entertain revenue officers or give any information to them, the good neighbors will come down out of the hills and shoot 'em up, just for a warning. So they're pretty careful what they say to strangers."

"Well, you aren't a stranger. That's why we brought you along."

"Exactly. And they've told me a little more than they would tell a stranger, though it isn't very much. They remember seeing your car and

they have also seen another car that came after yours and left before you did."

"Must have come while I was waiting there, too crippled up to move," said Chick-chick.

"I think you're right. It was a two-passenger runabout and there were two men in it. It stopped a couple of miles up the road."

"That's what we had guessed. It's the same runabout, with the same ugly scamps running it about. They've picked up Sister and made off with him, and all we can do is to start our own little car in chase. Did you find anything, Glen?"

"Nothing that would seem to do us any good. But I did make a find that to me is mighty interesting and very remarkable."

"What was it?"

"It was a pocket-knife. Here it is. I took up the trail at the place where we found Sister's cap, and followed it after all trace of his footsteps had gone and there was nothing but the prints of the man who captured him. It wasn't easy to follow by any means, and I lost it a good many times. It leads out on the road a couple of miles away, and I suppose that is where their car stood. I picked up this knife just before I got to the road."

"Is it Apple's knife?"

"No. Apple never owned it."

"Must have been dropped by the kidnapper then," said Chick-chick. "What's remarkable about it? Looks like a common, cheap, two-bladed knife."

"So it is. But it's more than that to me. There's a name scratched on the big blade. See if you can read it."

Chick-chick studied it for a moment.

"Why, it's your name!" he exclaimed. "Glen Mason! I'll bet I can explain this. Sister must have owned the knife and scratched this name on it and dropped it where he did, so as to give us a clue."

"He would have been more likely to scratch his own name," objected Grubb.

"I think so, too," said Glen. "Another thing is that I know that knife and I don't think Sister ever owned it. That knife used to be my property. It was years ago, in the days when I was in the Reform School. I scratched that name on the blade myself."

"How did Sister Clark ever get hold of it, then?" asked Chick-chick.

"He didn't," said Glen. "That knife was

dropped by one of the kidnappers. Before I left the school I traded it to a boy we called Nixy. I don't remember his real name but it may have been Nixon. It is quite possible that this very boy, now a young man, for he was older than I, is one of those whom we are chasing."

"That doesn't sound so awfully good," said Chick-chick. "By this time your Reform School boy may be a murdering criminal."

"I'm afraid of that myself," Glen admitted. "It's what I would have been if I'd kept on going my own way. But you must remember that these men, whoever they may be, didn't go after Sister for the purpose of murdering him."

"No. They want to get money, of course."

"Of course. So it's to their interest to treat him pretty well. The main point is that if such men have hold of Sister it isn't very much good for us to try to chase them, with forty-eight hours' start. They will take him to a town somewhere and try to get a reward. The police are already on the lookout and can do more than we can."

"You mean we should not try to follow them up."

"Not very far. What's the use. We might track them to a town, but we'd be sure to lose them

there. They will be after a reward and so give themselves away. Meantime we can be searching for Apple Newton, who hasn't any one else to look after him."

"I believe you're right," agreed Chick-chick. "Sister's not in danger but Apple is, so go after Apple."

"It sounds right to me," said Grubb. "This is as good a place as any to begin to hunt for him. We are now only about fifteen miles from the Sanatorium. He could easily have wandered this far. The best way to look for him is to go over every road in this section and inquire carefully at every house. We must not only ask if folks have seen him, but also if they have heard anything about him. If he's a little out of his head, he'll be that much easier to find because people pay a lot more attention to any one who is queer. We won't miss a single inhabitant."

CHAPTER X

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

CHICK-CHICK'S ingenious guesswork about the disappearance of Sister Clark differed somewhat from the actual facts, but not widely. There had been a struggle, noiseless and brief.

Sister found his way to the spring easily enough. It was slight in flow, and not such an easy matter to collect a bucketful, clean and wholesome. Sister threw his cap under a tree and knelt down by the spring with a collapsible cup from his pocket, prepared to fill the bucket a cupful at a time.

While busy at this work he heard some one approach from the woods. He turned, expecting to see some uncouth native, and was rather surprised to find a man of good style and appearance, evidently as much a stranger to the place as himself.

"Slow work!" said the stranger.

"It sure is," Sister agreed. "But I've all day and nothing else to do. I have a brother in distress and this is to help him."

"Brother, is it?" repeated the stranger. "Brother and you traveling together?"

"Sure," said Sister, broadly and mischievously. "Two others, too!"

"You say there are—?"

"Four of us," replied Sister. "There's Henry and Glen and Matt and myself—all brothers."

"And you're the smallest and the youngest?"

"That's about it, I reckon. The others are big enough to eat me up."

"So they made you get the water. Just like big brothers, sure enough."

"Not a bit of it," stoutly replied Sister, and in defense of their conduct he was about to explain the absence of the big fellows when prudence checked his tongue. "I'm getting this water because I want to."

"Well, you'll never get that pail filled that way," said the visitor. "Better come over with me to our camp. It's only a little way and you can fill up in no time. Come on, now."

"I guess I'll stay here," objected Sister, for the man had put his hand on his shoulder as if to compel him to go, and Sister, with his growing spirit of independence, rebelled at such an act of coercion.

"No, you won't stay here. You'll just come along with me," insisted the man, giving the boy's arm a pull that, if good-natured, was yet very forcible.

Sister sprang at him like a young wildcat, and so unexpected was the attack that the man fell before his charge and both rolled to the ground together. It was in this tussle that the coat button was torn loose.

"Now see what you've done," exclaimed the visitor, persistently good-natured. "You've kicked over the bucket and muddied up the spring so that there'll be no fresh water here for quite a while. Pick up your pail and come along."

The facts were beyond dispute. Sister, shamefaced at his conduct, started in the direction pointed out as the way to the fictitious camp. But he had not gone far until he thought of Chick-chick.

"I'd better run over to our car and tell where I'm—"

His remarks were cut painfully short. It was no part of his companion's scheme that he should run over to a car where he supposed three strong young men were assembled. He desired to have this slim, young boy all by himself. So, as Sister

turned away, something slipped over his head that muffled him completely. The next moment his slight body was pitched across the broad shoulders of the visitor—no longer unprepared—and he felt himself borne away, he knew not where.

It was not part of the stranger's plan to burden himself with a heavy load for a longer time than necessary, so when he felt that a safe distance had been traveled he set Sister Clark on his feet, straightened up, and drew a deep breath.

"I guess all the noise you can make now won't do any harm," he said, removing the head wrapping. "Walk right along with me, now; and don't try any such useless stunts as hollering or running."

"Where are you taking me?" asked Sister.

"To meet my partner," the man replied, "He's waiting for me on a road that is maybe a mile or so from here, and he has a little car that'll carry you as well as us. He'll want to see you."

"I don't see what for," said Sister. "Let me go, please. You can't get any good by taking me off."

"Don't be too sure about that," replied the man. "That's what we're going to find out. Step lively, now, and we'll get there quicker."

It was a long and tiresome march before they came out at last upon a rough road, and after traveling it for a mile found the little car. It was a very small, black roadster, so small as to be conspicuous by its very absence of size. The driver sat at the wheel, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, waiting in weary patience. He turned his head as he heard their footsteps. To Sister's great dismay it was the man who had lost his two front teeth.

When the fellow saw Sister Clark his face assumed an expression of great annoyance.

"What's that ye got?" he asked.

"Something worth a lot more'n a few bits of joolery," replied the kidnapper. "You said that the boy you two fellows took the watch from was old man Burton's son, Matt. Well, this is his young brother."

"What if he is?" asked the man in the car, scanning Sister Clark with a critical eye. "There's nothing on him worth while. Hasn't got so much as a watch, so far as I can see."

"You don't see far enough," said the other man. "If this boy is a son of the Lumber King, he's worth a hundred watches to us."

"I know him now," said the toothless one.

"He's the kid as told us who was young Matt. I don't believe he's a brother, at all. What's your name, kid?"

"William Clark," responded Sister bravely.

"Just what I thought," sneered the fellow. "What d'ye mean telling the man you was young Burton's brother. What d'ye mean by such lies?"

"I didn't tell a lie," replied Sister hotly. "We are brothers in a way—brother explorers and brother scouts. That's all I meant, and I didn't suppose he was looking for somebody to kidnap."

"You be careful, now, boy. You be careful what you say we're a tryin' to do. If we want to keep you for a while, an' see you get back safe to your folks when they get good an' ready for you, that isn't to say you can go an' talk about us bein' kidnappers. Don't you say it now."

"Well, what have you been following us all around for then?" Sister was almost in tears as he spoke.

"Who's been following any one around? We're in the Ozarks 'cause we have business here. D'ye suppose we'd follow a parcel o' boys, for days, to get their little bits o' trinkets? We got business

in these hills an' you boys better keep away from us."

"I'd just be glad of the chance," said Sister. "Make this man take his hands off, and I'll go back along the road to the other boys mighty quick."

"No you won't. The other fellows can go without you. We been to a good deal o' trouble with you an' we'll jest keep you safe till we don't need you any longer, an' somebody's willin' to pay us for your keep."

"You're making a great mistake," Sister assured them. "I have no wealthy folks to pay for me. You'll have all your trouble for nothing."

"I don't know. 'Tain't likely Millionaire Burton's boy would trail along with fellows that haven't a cent."

"That's just what he's been doing," insisted Sister, the tears at last overflowing their natural channels in spite of his brave efforts to keep them in check. "It's a fact, I tell you. My folks couldn't pay you a hundred dollars."

"Mebbe not. But I guess if Burton thought it would be his boy next, he might help some. I guess we'll take good care of you for a little while anyway."

They remained obdurate in this decision in spite of Sister's tears and protests.

"Load him into the car," said the leader. "We'll be getting a few miles further on before the light's shut off. I guess you needn't tie him. He can't get away from us."

Sister had now broken down completely and was sobbing in a trembling, scared fashion such as he had not given away to before at any time on this trip. It was small wonder that his captors saw little necessity for exercising guard over him, for no longer did he show even the spirit of a mouse.

Poor boy. It was terrible to think that every mile this little car carried him, he was going farther away from his mother, from the boys who were his partners, from all that he loved, forward to a black fate of mystery and doubt, subject to the hard dictation of these men whom he feared and hated. Little wonder that he sobbed and little wonder that they thought him completely cowed.

There was an effect of Sister's crying, however, upon which his captors had not reckoned. It cleared his mental atmosphere. After a time it soothed the bitterness of his feelings. He got over feeling sorry for himself. The inspiration of his companionship with the three scouts as-

serted itself and he began to wonder what one of them would do in such a case. He felt sure that Glen would escape. He knew that Matt or Chick-chick would at least try. It came to him with much force that his absence would be a serious worry and would greatly handicap them in their expedition. Yes; he must get away. He yet gave an occasional sob, but it was merely a reflex, though his captors were not wise enough to know this.

They stopped at last, for the dusk of evening was making itself felt. They had been traveling through a road lined with woods on either hand, but at their stopping place was a clearing perhaps a hundred yards deep.

The two men got out and stretched their legs.

"You can stay in the car till we get ready for you," said the leader. "We're goin' to get some supper. I guess you know better'n to leave that car, with the woods all about you and night comin' on."

The only precaution taken by the thieves against Sister's escape had been to run their car in to the end of the clearing—a hundred yards or so—until its nose rested against the brush beyond which lay the heavy woods. This seemed to them ample

protection and they went away to get ready for their meal, leaving the boy sitting in the car with the battery key still in position.

Sister Clark felt that if any opportunity of escape was to come to him this evening, now was the time. With wild thoughts of jumping out and pushing his way into the woods he peered eagerly through the brush in front of him. Then he made a discovery that caused his pulses to bound with excitement and a bold plan to take form in his mind.

The gloom of evening was fast falling in the woods into which he cast his searching vision, yet he could clearly make out that beyond the brush lay an old wagon trail leading away into the distance. It could scarcely have been called a road, for it was overgrown with brush and weeds, but at least it was free from trees and once on its track he felt sure that the little roadster would make its way.

There lay in front of him some fifty yards of brush and woods through which he must pilot the car diagonally, before reaching the track. The trees were scattered here and there. He was not sure that they gave room for the passage of the car. He could tell only as he tried. The question

was—had he the courage to make the effort? Would he dare this dash for liberty?

Sister sat very quiet in the car—still bent over—still a picture of grief. Not by a motion did he betray his excitement, yet his mind was fully made up. Glen would do it. Chick-chick would do it; even Matt would do it, beyond a doubt. He must try, and use all his new-born courage in the attempt.

He studied carefully the intervening stretch of woods and mapped in his mind just how he would steer to avoid the trees. He must choose just the right moment, for time would be very precious.

He heard the toothless one declare his intention of going for water, and looking cautiously around watched his disappearance. The other man, desiring some flat stones which he proposed to use in cooking, had gone back to the roadway. His back was turned to the car as he dug up the stones. Now was the time!

Sister Clark noiselessly threw his switch on to the battery, jumped out of the car and gave one swift turn to the crank. The engine, still hot from its run, responded beautifully. The noise of its throbbing gave the first notice of trouble to the man at the road.

It was an anxious moment for Sister. He was saved by a tactical terror of his opponent. The man was at the far end of the road. He assumed that the only direction in which Sister could travel was to turn and come back to the traveled road. Therefore he ran straight down the roadway to head off escape instead of cutting across to the car.

The fellow saw his mistake as the little car crashed straight through the brush. Sister was desperate. He got into high gear in five seconds, and with a warm engine prompt to his guidance, there was no lack of power. Dodging between the trees the little car had some tight squeezes, but by the time the man in chase had reached the brush she was safe in the old wagon track.

One swift glance did Sister allow himself to cast back.

"Good-by!" he shouted, as the car shot away into the gathering gloom.

The man behind stopped to give the word to his companion. No man on foot could catch that car unless it met with some obstruction.

"The little monkey!" he gasped, breathlessly, shaking his fist at the disappearing car. "Who'd ha' thought it?"

CHAPTER XI

"GOD'S OVER US!"

SISTER knew that he could not run the car very far without lights, for already it was growing so dark that he could but dimly outline the track running between the rows of trees. There was a great rattling of brush and weeds against the fenders and drip-pan, but he halted not for that. Fifteen minutes of this speed and he would be five or six miles away.

As soon as he found that his pursuer was distanced he moderated his pace, and kept his feet on clutch and brake pedals, ready to stop at an instant's notice. Such a trail as the one he traveled might end abruptly in a fence, a ditch or a bog, just as likely as in the highway for which he hoped.

It was well that he took time to be cautious. The road became more and more overgrown with brush, and a few sturdy saplings stood forth to resent this noisy invasion of their wilderness soli-

tude. Scarcely had the engine recovered from the strain of attacking one when another, still larger, loomed ahead in the dusk. Sister had no time to stop his car. He tried to edge around, but, just as he felt that success was assured, the rear right wheel slipped in the yielding bank, the car skidded around, and gracefully and quietly she sank down the side of a deep ravine.

Sister Clark clung to the steering wheel without difficulty, for the little car had managed the maneuver so gracefully that one might have supposed she was merely backing down hill in obedience to directions. He saw at once that obedience in climbing back would be a very different matter, so, fearful that the chase was close behind him, he seized a basket that seemed to contain food, and scrambling up on the opposite side of the gully, sped away into the woods.

Out in the open track there had yet remained a little light, but here in the woods it was dark—quite dark. Sister pushed along in hot energy on a run that seemed to cover many miles. Branches scratched his face and tore his clothing. He stumbled against trees, only to carom off from them and push vaguely on. He was hot, sweating and terribly tired. All was dark around him.

At last he sank exhausted to the ground, noticing in his fall that the few remaining packages in the basket that he still clutched were scattered about. He began to grope for them in a mechanical way, and his grip upon a loaf of bread aroused in him the instinct of hunger.

With awakened concentration he managed to find, in addition to the bread, part of a cooked chicken, and he ate voraciously in spite of the state of fright to which the darkness and solitude of the woods had again reduced him.

The food gave him a little cheer, and he even became calm enough to smile to himself at the discomfiture of his late captors when they should discover their car and find it empty of food. He must have a care of this food, for it was his sole supply until he found a house, as he surely would do the next day.

But the night—a long night must pass before the coming of day. How he wished the night would pass! How dense was this great darkness! He was even more fearful than when in the hands of the kidnappers. Had they appeared he would have run to them for protection. There were wild animals in these woods. Matt had said so. He had certainly spoken of wolves and wildcats.

That rustling in the trees—what was it? Those sparks of light—were they the glistening eyes of a mountain lion? Perhaps the smell of food had attracted wild animals.

Sister lay full length upon the ground, face buried in his hands. But lying thus he quaked every moment, feeling the tearing of a mountain lion's claws through his clothing; so, asserting himself as best he could, he roused up to destroy the illusion.

Certainly something moved! A terrible commotion shook the trees above. No animal could be responsible for such a tremendous agitation. More terrific than a wildcat—more fierce than a hungry wolf—it was the rush of an oncoming mountain storm.

One who never has felt it cannot estimate the intensity of a storm in the mountains. The wind may be no stronger, but it meets little to check its power, and much upon which to play its mighty chords. Myriads of leaves murmur and rustle to its prompting. The branches sway to its urging and the weak ones groan and creak and fall. Gathering force, its onrush brings to earth some crippled giant of the forest, with a mighty crash. The lightning may be no sharper, yet its blaze

lights up a thousand specters of dread, unseen in ordinary places. And the thunder—certainly there is no place where thunder booms forth its sharp explosions so near to the ear of man. Add to all this the dread solitude, and the fear of being lost, and it is small wonder that, for a moment, Sister Clark felt that his little world had reached its end and he must surely die.

For a moment! Then the awakening manhood that the last few days had bred in him again grew dominant. It reached back to the foundation of things. It proved that his mother's precepts had not been wasted, that although they had been repeated into ears that seemed heedless, although day after day had passed without outward sign of the work, yet the foundation had been built. In the last few days this boy into whose building so much material had been put with so little structure to show for it, had been under the hand of a master builder, in the form of a Christian companion who from his own frailties had guessed how to make the weak points strong. Sister Clark was beginning now to erect a superstructure with girders and rivets of unfailing material—such metal as is used in the whole armor of God.

So it was a phrase of Glen Mason's that stirred

him to action—a favorite phrase, not thrown about carelessly but used without hesitation or apology in places where it fitted well. It was in the dark of night that he had last heard it uttered. He had been clinging to Glen in terror, and old Brick had strengthened him with this: "Don't mind, old fellow, God's over us!"

Better than any philosophy he could construct. God's will must be right, and so, if "God's over us," all must be well. Away with cowardly fear: "God's over us."

It was a call to action. "God's over us," he said aloud, and, stooping, he picked up the basket and packed away his provisions. He knew no way to step, not even did he know the direction in which he had come, yet it seemed better to move than to stand.

"God's over us," he repeated, as sharp bushes scratched his face in his stumbles through the darkness.

There came a sudden, unexpected, blinding flash from the skies, almost immediately followed by thunder in such a deafening peal as is heard only in a mountain storm. Sister sank to the ground, but was up in a moment, repeating to himself his cry of refuge.

Do not think that this boy stood there in the woods and welcomed the lightning flash and the thunder peal. Each visitation was still a distinct shock to his trembling body. He would hide his face in a tree; he would fling himself to the ground. But when the concussion had passed, instead of lying in unreasoning terror of the next attack, he would rise to his feet, take heart from his watch-word of "God's over us," and continue his journey, though he knew not where he went.

The rain bothered more than the lightning now, for it came down in heavy torrents, drenching him to the skin. He was afraid to shelter himself in the lee of the large trees, for once or twice he had heard the rending sound that told him that one had been made the agent for transmitting a bolt to the earth, and had crashed to its death in so doing.

So he dragged on through the storm, soaked to the skin, shocked by the flashes and reports, fearful of the falling branches, yet struggling with persistence born of his new source of courage and determination.

The rain had slackened and the lightning entirely ceased, when his eye was caught by a feeble light seen dimly through a group of trees. He

hurried forward, hoping and praying for friendly shelter. As he drew near he expected to see the outlines of a house, but instead there rose up before him a mighty bluff, seeming to reach into the sky. The light still persisted, though, and he kept steadily toward it, for be it house, or tent, or sheltered fire, he felt that it must betoken human company.

At last he seemed to be walking slap up against the face of the bluff, and then he saw that his light came from a blazing fire set back in a cavernous opening, which he might have passed without notice in daylight, so overhung was it with creeping vines, the light of the fire coming through a central aperture just large enough to admit a man's body.

By the fire stood a boy. He must have been out in the rain, for he had arranged forked sticks to make a drying rack on which hung most of his clothing. He was rather a wild looking figure in the glare of the firelight. He had long hair that the rain had draggled over his face so that he was in a constant effort to push it back from his eyes. His skin was covered with a heavy tan over all the upper part of his body. The clothing that hung at the fire was of scant dimensions.

Sister Clark crept through the aperture into the ring of light.

"My name's Clark," he announced, much as he thought Glen would have done. "I'm soaked to the skin and chilled through with it; may I get dry at your fire?"

The cave boy nodded assent.

The atmosphere of the cave was a very welcome one to cold and chilly Sister Clark. He sat down his basket with its sodden contents, and hastened to follow his host's example by stripping off his wet clothing. The cave boy motioned to him to find a seat on a mass of leaves and boughs set back in the warmth of the fire. He seemed to have no curiosity as to the identity of his hasty visitor, asking no questions and requiring no references. Probably he could speak but he had not yet done so.

Sister Clark gave him a steady look, and decided that the search for Apple Newton was ended. He had found him—found the one for whom the expedition was made! And both were lost!

"What do they call you?" asked Sister, anxiously.

The reply in cultivated speech confirmed Sister's guess.

"They call me 'White Boy.'"

"Yes, but what is your name?"

"I can't tell that," replied the cave boy. "I don't know always how to tell what things are. Sometimes only I can."

"I don't understand," said Sister, bewildered. "I can tell who you are, though. You are Apple Newton. Do you understand?" He raised his voice almost to a shout as if he would thus reach the boy's comprehension. "Your name is Apple Newton or Corliss Newton."

"Apple Newton is good enough," said the cave boy, who had forgotten his own name and all names. "I am Apple Newton. I shall remember it now. I have learned many names since I have been living with those who call me 'white boy.'"

"Why do they call you that?" asked Sister. "Are they negroes?"

"I don't know; what are negroes? Perhaps they are, but they call themselves 'culled folks.'"

"Colored folks!" said Sister. "Of course. It's another name for negro. Well, you've been with them long enough. I shall take you home."

But "home" did not bring to Apple's mind the picture intended by Sister.

"Not until light comes. Then I can find the—

I have forgotten again—she gives milk. Oh, yes, the cow, and go home as I promised. They would beat me if I came without her."

"What? Beat you!" cried Sister.

"Yes. They are very big and I am but one. I am tired, Clark. We can do nothing until light comes. Let us lie down."

He seemed to have no great excitement about Sister Clark's coming, nor any idea that to him it meant deliverance. He took his dry clothing from the improvised rack, lay down on the couch of branches and leaves and dropped asleep like a baby.

Sister Clark sat a long time in meditation. He was alone in a mountain cave, with a "crazy boy." Always he had been possessed with a most exaggerated fear of any person not normal in mind. But now he had no fear.

The only human beings to whom this boy could give direction were "colored folks," not the kindly, respectable colored people whom Sister Clark both knew and liked in his own little town, but some who were both big and cruel. But Sister Clark, thinking again of the possible "beating," pulled himself together and squared his shoulders and knit his brows in resolve that such bondage should cease.

He had thrown off unreasoning terror, for he had found refuge in a great truth and a holy thought, "God's over us!" He, Sister Clark, despised for his weakness, was now a champion of the oppressed. When he himself lay down it was to a sleep as peaceful as that of his comrade.

CHAPTER XII

SISTER CLARK RESCUES APPLE

THE two boys looked out of their cave at the first appearance of dawn and saw the promise of a glorious day. They breakfasted on the remains of the chicken and the water-soaked bread, in the cooking of which Apple Newton demonstrated that the skill of old camping days was not lost.

The cow was found without much trouble.

"But why go back to those people?" argued Sister. "I don't like what you say about them. They must be the kind that make trouble, just like a certain class of white folks."

"I've promised to get the cow home," replied Apple.

"Let them find the cow," insisted Sister Clark. "I'm in a hurry to get you away. Your old chums are waiting for you; Glen Mason—Brick, you know—and Matt Burton and Chick-chick."

He hoped that these names would awaken some response, but they stirred no memories. Just one

thing was definitely fixed in Apple's mind. He had promised to bring back the cow—therefore the cow must be taken back.

Sister helped drive the animal through the woods until they came to an old shack in a rough clearing. He hoped earnestly that they might find the place empty, and, the cow delivered, he could induce Apple to go. But he was disappointed.

A negro of gigantic frame rose from a seat in the sun, laid aside a rank old pipe and advanced with a strap in his hand.

"Whar yo crazy white boy ben?" he asked. "What yo mean stoppin' out all night?"

He raised the strap with a threatening gesture, but Sister Clark, who had remained discreetly behind a tree, jumped sharply out.

"Don't you dare hit him," he cried.

The man stared in amazement. Then he turned to the cabin.

"Mandy!" he shouted. "Mandy, come out yere. Our lil ole white bossy went out'n de woods an' done come home wiv lil calf. Come out yere 'n see de critter."

A woman matching the man in stature, but of kindlier features, stepped out of the cabin. The humor of the situation did not seem to impress her

as it had her husband, who still laughed uproariously.

"Jes' what ah done tole you, Jake Johnson. Ah tole you dey'd be white folks arter dis boy, makin' trouble."

"Yo means savin' trouble, Mandy. Two boys now, dey is. Gwine save Jake f'm cuttin' wood, dey is. Winter mos' here, Mandy, an' no wood cut. Dese boys gwine wuk right dis minute."

And so it was. He led the boys to a rough pile of wood, gave them a couple of old saws, and sat down in a comfortable place to watch them. All day long the boys worked, though not without stop, for at noon Mandy brought them a savory rabbit stew.

"Youall boys don't need say we ain't feedin' yo," she said. "If youall gwine wuk for bo'd you sho'll git good bo'd." And at evening she maintained her part of the contract by calling them in to a substantial supper.

It was three days later, toward the close of the day, when Sister Clark noticed that they were no longer watched by Jake.

"This is our chance, Apple," he said. "We must go while he's away. Mandy's all right. She won't stop us."

"But we haven't sawed all the wood," objected Apple.

"We're not going to," said Sister decisively. "We gave him no promise."

"No, we did not. He said to, but we didn't promise," agreed Apple, laying down his saw.

"We must get as far as we can before dark," said Sister, as they hurried across the clearing.

"No one will find us in my cave," suggested Apple, with dawning initiative.

"Just the place," agreed Sister. "We can stay there over night and start out at daybreak. Lead the way."

It was dark when they reached the cave and lay down, supperless, to sleep on their improvised bed. Sister was so excited and elated that it was hard for him to get to sleep, but once he was off, he made up for the delay and it was long after daybreak when he awakened. A bright fire was burning and Apple was working around it.

"Say, but I'm hungry!" declared Sister. "I could eat a horse."

"How about baked taters," said Apple, brushing aside some embers and disclosing two big fellows whose cracked jackets spoke of a mealy inside.

"Oh, great!" shouted Sister. "You sure are an Eagle Scout, Apple. I'll bet one of your merit badges is for cooking."

"I can cook," Apple admitted. "What's an Eagle Scout?"

"A Scout who has won twenty-one merit badges. You're one. Say it, now—Eagle Scout."

"Eagle Scout," repeated Apple. "I'm glad to be one. It's another of the things I've forgotten."

"Forgotten the name but not the merit. I wish I knew as much as you remember. Say, those potatoes smell fine. Where'd you get 'em?"

"They're mine. Weeks ago we dug taters—Mandy and I. She gave me a sack for my own. When I found my cave I brought them here and once in a while I've cooked some. She gave me some salt as well as taters."

"But 'taters' isn't the right name, Apple. That's just what Mandy calls 'em. They are potatoes. Say it."

"Po-ta-toes," repeated Apple. "That does sound more natural. I believe some of those names are coming back to me. How about rabbit—is that a right name?"

"It sure is. I wish we had one."

"We have. I was up early and caught a nice one. See here."

He pushed away a mass of hot coals and poked aside a corner of earth enough to let Sister see the clever arrangement whereby a young rabbit cased in a coating of clay and leaves was undergoing the process of baking. A delicious odor came to their nostrils.

"That smell is nothing to what the taste will be in a little while," he assured Sister Clark.

Sister fully agreed with him when they sat down to the meal.

"It's absolutely wonderful!" he declared. "It's delicious! It's gumscrumptious!" He stuffed his mouth with another load of mealy potato, and then, sobering down to the real situation, he continued: "After all, Apple Newton, isn't it simply wonderful to be free. To get away from being a slave to that fellow. To be on the way back to our own people, and you not damaged at all, just as good as ever. And then to think who's doing it! Little Sister Clark! Ain't it great?"

"It certainly is fine, Clark. What did you call yourself?"

"Sister! That's my front name, about like Apple is yours."

"Oh, no; not 'Sister,'" objected Apple. "You can't jolly me like that nowadays, because I'm remembering too fast. Sister would do for somebody like Mandy. You must be—oh—brother."

"I'll like anything you call me," said Sister. "I shall be a mighty glad boy when we get home and I can tell my mother. Let's be starting. We'd better take that sack of potatoes, because we won't be back here."

Poor Sister Clark! He did not guess that in less than an hour he would be in need of Apple's help to get back to that welcome shelter, for rest until a badly sprained ankle was cured.

It was a sad blow to his hopes and bright anticipations. The only cheer he had was in Apple's encouragement and calm. Apple seemed perfectly content to come back to the cave—perfectly content to stay there an indefinite time. Not yet had his awakening memory reached the stage where things were calling to him from the outside world.

In this emergency the value of Eagle Scout training was again demonstrated. Apple knew just how to soothe the terrible throbbing—just what applications to make—just what dressings to apply. The linings of Sister's clothing supplied a bandage that gave tremendous support and relief.

By the third day the severe pain was gone so that Sister was again able to sleep and rest in comfort. But putting the swollen foot to the ground was yet very painful, and a long hike through the woods seemed far away. There was no danger of starvation, for the store of potatoes was still good, and every day Apple caught some kind of game to add to their food. But Sister had an anxiety which Apple did not share. He felt that the responsibility of bringing this boy out of the bondage in which he had been kept, back to his friends, improved in health and mind, rested upon his shoulders. Every moment that Apple was out after food he passed in dread that he would come to harm or capture. The nights were getting cold and but for the protection of the cave they would have suffered severely. Soon the season of severe storms would be upon them. And here he lay blocking all progress.

It is indicative of Sister Clark's development that he made no complaint about pain. Each day he set his teeth against any outcry while Apple made vigorous massage of muscles and ligaments. Yet the days slipped away, one by one, until ten had passd, and even yet it was doubtful if the injured ankle would carry him as much as a mile.

CHAPTER XIII

FRIDAY CIRCUMLYCUTION

FIVE days had passed and the three Scouts still searched laboriously for Apple Newton. They had traveled a great many miles, yet they were still within fifty miles of the Sanatorium, for their journeyings had led them along many winding paths, up one hill and down another, winding here and turning there to cover all of the sparsely settled territory, and time and again had they crossed their own tracks and doubled their journeys.

They had just settled down to their midday meal when a colored man of rather vacant countenance came along the road and begged for a meal. They gave him as good a share as their own and he ate heartily, heavily, and noisily with evident appreciation.

"Dat certn'y am good eatin'," he said, smacking his lips at the end of the meal. "Any time I c'n do somethin' foh youall white gemmens I sholy run my foots off doin' it."

"Perhaps you can do something right now," said Grubb. "Tell us if you have seen a lost boy."

"White boy?"

"Sure. It's one of our friends."

"I sholy has. How many white boys you lost?"

"Two. How many have you seen?"

"Boss, I ain't much on figgerin' but two white boys is jes zackly what I seen."

"That'll do now. Tell the truth."

"Why, boss, how many white boys you want me to found?"

"We don't want you to found any. We want you to tell the truth."

"Ain't I tellin' the trufe? Youall want two white boys. I tell ye 'bout two white boys. What more youall want?"

"Well, where are they?"

"Boss, does youall gemmens want know 'bout dese yere white boys, 'bout a dollah's wuff?"

"There, I knew he was trying to work us," said Chick-chick. "Get away from here, now. You've had your dinner and that's all you'll get from us."

"But, Boss, I sholy do know 'bout dese two white boys."

"Did you see them both in the same place?"

"I sholy did, Boss."

"That proves he's lying. Our two boys couldn't possibly be together."

"Not at all likely," agreed Glen. "You'd better run along. We don't believe you."

"Youall go ober Brimstone Mountain and down de oder side into Black Valley to whar mah cousin Jake live an' you'll believe me. I wouldn't tell no lie foh no dollah."

"You won't get it from us," said Chick-chick, "so you may as well trot along."

"That man was too anxious to please," continued Chick-chick, as the colored man disappeared from view. "In the first place he had to find out that we wanted to find a white boy and very promptly he found one. Then he discovers that we want two white boys, and just as promptly he finds two. He does it rather too easily."

"I suppose he thought it an easy way to pay for his dinner and perhaps get a dollar besides," said Glen. "By the way, is there any Black Valley and Brimstone Mountain?"

"Yes. His information is right that far," said Grubb. "Brimstone Mountain is the high hill to the west of us, and you get to Black Valley by crossing over it, just as the man said. I wish we

had asked his cousin Jake's name. We might have inquired if such a man lived there, anyway."

"It would only be following another wild clue," said Chick-chick. "I'm getting tired of running down clews that don't get us anywhere. I thought you were going to get us to Doctor Gray's place and his troop of Boy Scouts to-day."

"I was and I am," said Grubb. "We shall be there before night, unless you want to turn off and go back to Brimstone Moutain, and I don't think any of us places enough confidence in our dinner guest to go fifteen miles over a mountain trail on his suggestion."

"Not for me," said Glen. "Lead us to Doctor Gray and his Boy Scouts. I'd like to see a Boy Scout again—somebody besides Chick-chick—I'd like to go to a Scout meeting. I'd like to give the grip and stand at attention and give the salute."

"So would I," agreed Chick-chick. "Lead us on to Doctor Gray."

So the boys turned their backs on Brimstone Mountain and as the sun was setting they drove the faithful Overfordarrowpack into the little town where lived Doctor Gray, a very intelligent physician of advanced ideas, who had organized and

maintained the only troop of Boy Scouts within a radius of fifty miles.

"It looks good," said Chick-chick, as they drew up at Doctor Gray's porch and saluted the flag. "Here's a troop of real Boy Scouts. We're going to get somewhere, now."

Filled with this idea, the boys advanced and knocked. They were anxious to see Doctor Gray. If he were away the door would very likely be opened by a Boy Scout, and perhaps he would even wear the beloved uniform. They waited in some suspense as the door slowly opened, and then all three broke out into wild laughter at the comical figure before them.

In the doorway stood a very small, very dirty, and very ragged colored boy. He had evidently been disturbed in his slumbers by their knocking, for he was still rubbing his eyes, looking up at them inquiringly, yet sleepily.

"Are you Doctor Gray?" asked Chick-chick.

"Youall white boys go away. Why you call me Doctor Gray?"

"Talks in rhyme," said Chick-chick. "Wonder if he knows it. The sign on the door says 'Doctor Gray,' so we supposed he lived here. Where is he?"

"I jes' come to dis yere town. Walked in yere an' lay right down. Nebber seen no Doctor Gray. Waitin' fer him come dis way."

"Be careful, boy," said Chick-chick. "That's a dangerous habit you're getting. I knew a fellow once who got to talking in rhyme all the time and he starved to death because he couldn't find words to ask for his grub. Now you stop right where you are and tell us what you know about Doctor Gray."

"I'm atellin' de trufe. I jes come to dis town and walked in yere to show doctor mah sore toe, an' lay down an' went to sleep."

"What's the excitement?" asked a voice from the doorway.

Looking up the boys saw a tall man of middle age, with very bushy black hair and eyebrows and an expression that at first sight seemed quite fierce. The ferocity, however, was belied by a merry twinkle in his eye as he surveyed the group.

"We are looking for Doctor Gray," said Glen.

"Very well; you are also looking *at* him," said the doctor. "Which is the patient?"

"The colored boy was first," replied Glen.

"We are not here on professional matters and will wait."

"All right. 'First come, first served,'" is my motto. Now, young man," he continued, turning to the colored boy, "tell me who you are, what your name is and what you want of me, without any circumlocution."

"I sure would admiah foh to hear dat word again, suh," said the boy.

"What word? Circumlocution?"

"Yes, suh. Dat sure am a fine word. Mah name is Friday Circumlycution, suh."

"I said without circumlocution."

"Yes, suh; widout circumlycution."

"What do you want, Friday?"

"I has a bealin' in mah toe, suh, so to de doctor I mus' go, suh."

"How did you get the bealin' in your toe?"

"I tink it must a ben a splinter. I had it in since way last winter."

"How long? That would mean several months."

"Day befoh yes'day's de time, suh; had to say winter foh to rhyme, suh."

"You'd better quit rhyming then. Come in the

office and I'll take it out for you. It's just a little job that any intelligent boy ought to be able to do. If I had one of my Boy Scouts here I'd turn you over to him."

"We are Scouts, sir," said Glen and Chick-chick in unison.

"I'm a second year medical student," added Grubb.

"All right. You take care of him. He doesn't need medical aid for a job like that."

Friday was edging away from the group. At a distance of twenty feet he turned in the street and said, "Doctor, youall mean let dese boys 'speriment on me?"

"It isn't experimenting," said the doctor. "They are easily able to take care of you."

"Good-by, youall. I'se gwine somewhere else," said the boy, and ran away at a surprising pace considering his swollen toe.

"He'll come back," said the doctor. "I'm sure you could have taken care of him all right and I like to give Scouts a chance to practice. The way for a boy to learn First Aid is to study it and then do it."

"Yes, sir. Our old Scoutmaster, Captain Newton, taught us that."

"Captain Newton, did you say?" asked Doctor Gray. "I think I've met him. He is a brother of Doctor Newton over at the Sanatorium, isn't he?"

"He was, sir. He is dead, now. Over a year ago."

"Indeed. I'm very sorry to hear it. He was a fine fellow. I met him and we became quite well acquainted a few years ago when he was down in this part of the country. I admired him very much."

"He was a mighty fine man," said Glen. "One of the finest men that ever lived. He did a tremendous lot for us boys, and we are in this country now, trying to find his son."

"I don't quite understand," said Doctor Gray. "You mean that his son lives in this neighborhood and you are trying to locate him?"

"No, sir. His son, a boy of our age, named Corliss, came down here to be with his uncle, Doctor Newton, at the Sanatorium. He became very ill, and while out of his head, he wandered away. Doctor Newton made what he considered a very thorough search, and, failing to find him, gave him up for dead. Four of us who were his old chums and in the same Troop of Boy Scouts came down here determined to find him. We lost one of our

company over a week ago, kidnapped, we think. Another one we left at the Sanatorium so that Doctor Newton would let us have this young man for a guide. Now we are searching for the two boys, and our reason for coming to you is to get you and your troop of Scouts to help."

"So Newton gave his nephew up, did he?" commented Doctor Gray.

"Yes, sir. He searched hard while he was at it, but he didn't keep at it very long."

"His own nephew, and the son of that fine fellow who was down here," mused the doctor. "It's a shame. I'll help you all I can. So will the Scouts. It's our regular meeting to-night. The boys come from long distances, so we start early and close early. Come in and eat supper with me, all of you. Right after supper the Scouts will be here and we'll tell you what can be done."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MOUNTAIN SCOUTS

ALL through the evening there constantly recurred to Glen's mind the foolish story of the two white boys supposed to be in Black Valley on the other side of Brimstone Mountain. He did not like to pay much attention to the story of an irresponsible negro, but he was haunted by the fear of slighting a genuine clew.

As the Scouts came dropping in for the meeting, he made a point of asking each one if he came from Black Valley, but it seemed that Black Valley was very poorly inhabited and, being almost a full day's journey away, was not represented. The boys were fine, manly fellows, though most of them were shy, and, their school advantages being limited, they were somewhat unpolished in speech and awkward in manner.

Doctor Gray explained to the troop about the two lost boys and they were intensely interested. Every Scout present was willing to search night and day until the boys were found.

"That's another job for us Mountain Scouts," said one tall, awkward, earnest boy. "This here Scout run astray in our hills, and we got to make good with him. We got to ship him back home right side up with care. There's another big job we're a helpin' on as I'll have to tell you stranger Scouts about. We-all Scouts come of decent people that's dead sot against moonshinin' and we're a goin' to run it out. Maybe we can do both at the same time. Whiles we're ahuntin' the 'still' we may find your comrade, and whiles you're a huntin' your comrade you may find the 'still.' To-night we're lookin' for some word f'm Scout Payson, who's been on the trail all the week. He's late, but here he comes right now."

Scout Payson was a heavy, thick-set lad, slow in speech, but determined in manner. His report was very brief.

"The time's about came," he said. "They's a revenue officer stayin' at Four Corners now, ready to join in. Sixty barrels o' liquor went out o' these hills last week. The way they do is one fellow runs it a few miles one night, then another party hitches on to it the next night. We got evidence, but we got to get a bit more, and then a whole army of revenue men'll come an' clean out

the gang. This week we went to watch Brimstone Mountain.''

''Did you say Brimstone Mountain?'' asked Glen.

''That's the place I said.''

''And will you cross over to the west of it and search Black Valley?''

''No. The prospect is better on the east side.''

''But I think there's a chance of finding a lost Scout on the west side.''

Several voices broke in, explaining to the new arrival the facts about the search for the lost boys, and Glen told of the conversation with the negro, who had told the story of seeing two white boys in Black Valley.

''I know that nigger,'' said Payson. ''I know his cousin Black Jake Johnson, too, an' I don't know much good about him.''

''But if that much of his story were true, there is just a possibility that the rest is. I hate to overlook the slightest chance.''

''It doesn't look like a chance to me,'' said Payson. ''The only thing he would have told you for would have been to spite his cousin Jake, and I don't reckon he'd do that.''

"How much out of the way will it be to go to the Black Valley and visit Jake's place?"

"Goin' and comin' it's a good day's journey. We-all folks is awful set on fightin' these stills out. We hate to lose a day right now."

"What he says is right," said the tall, earnest Scout, speaking again. "We hate to lose a day. But I reckon we're true Scouts, an' 'A Scout is Loyal.' If this comrade wants us to search Black Valley, how many scouts will go? Stand up!"

Every scout rose to his feet, Payson included. Glen felt a great gratification. Perhaps it was absurd to attach any importance to the negro's story. Yet he could not feel at ease until it had received attention. So all was arranged for a visit by the Mountain Scouts to the mysterious Jake's place in Black Valley, west of Brimstone Mountain. It was a great proof that "A Scout is Loyal."

The doctor had a large comfortable house and pressed his hospitality so urgently that the boys slept in a comfortable bed that night, the first time in weeks. They were up early in the morning, and ready to follow their guide to Black Valley. They

would leave their car in the doctor's barn, for the journey was over rough and narrow trails.

"I can't come with you now," said Doctor Gray. "But I have a very good horse that gets me over these hill roads at good speed, so I may drop in on you before the day is up. Give my regards to Black Jake if I don't get there."

Only one of the Mountain Scouts was there to start out with the boys, but as they journeyed along they dropped in one by one until there were five, making the party eight strong. All of them were on foot.

"Foot work is the safest way for scoutin' in these hills," explained Payson. "A man on a hoss is a dandy mark for a fellow behind a tree with a gun. In case of danger always go afoot."

There was yet another reason for going on foot. They threaded close, brushgrown trails that were impassable in any other way, and several times they crossed deep gulches by a single pole upon which no horse could have maintained a balance. Long before the day was done Glen and Chick-chick realized that the Mountain Scouts might reasonably have hesitated at a trip to Black Valley.

Towards the close of the afternoon a man quietly joined the party and went forward with them.

"It's the revenue officer, Mr. Wilson," whispered Payson to Glen. "He's going to take a look at Black Jake's place."

They were in the Black Valley now, and the traveling became much easier, and at intervals they crossed cultivated fields. Mr. Wilson had said very little, but now he gave his first instructions.

"You boys go right along like a lot of Scouts out on a hike," he instructed. "Go right up to Jake's place and look for your friends. Tell him you have come after the white boys he has here. That will be better than asking him if he has any. While you are attracting his attention in the front of the place, I'll look around a little."

Black Jake's place was little more than a clearing in the woods, though there was a fairly definite wagon trail leading to it. The boys approached cautiously, taking careful note of their surroundings, and looking eagerly for anything that might denote the presence of the lost Scouts.

Payson was the first one to make a find. He signaled eagerly to Glen.

"What's the matter?" asked Glen, coming quietly over to him.

"I can get a good square look at the house from here with my field glasses," said Payson. "Black Jake Johnson's had his wood sawed an' piled jest lately. He never did it himself."

"You think he might have had our boys at work?"

"Jest as like as anybody. Watch for 'em."

It was not the desire of the revenue officer that any show of force should be made.

"Two of you can go to the house and keep Black Jake and his wife busy at the front of the house. I'll take a little look around the back," he directed. "If you find the boys and need help to get them away come quietly back and let me know."

Glen and Grubb were the two chosen representatives, and as they neared the house they went boldly forward with no attempt at concealment.

Jake Johnson was sitting in front of his shack, asleep in the sun. The boys were within a few feet of him before he was aroused, and then he jumped to his feet with a sudden start and looked around in a dazed fashion.

"Decided to come back an' finish sawin' that wood, did ye?" he shouted. It was evident that

he knew enough about the hidden still to be able to secure some of its product, and had been sleeping off his potations. He swayed unsteadily as he spoke.

"We aren't the boys that you kept here," Glen spoke up boldly. "We've come after them. What have you done with 'em?"

"I never done a thing," replied the negro. "All I done was give dem boys nice home an' plenty to eat. Den what does dey do but run off! Youall got to stay an' work like dey done. Mandy, oh, Mandy! Come yere an' tell 'bout how you fed dem boys."

A big black woman came from the rear of the cabin at his call. She, being perfectly sober, saw at once that instead of two frightened boys, they were facing responsible young men.

"Don't pay no 'tenshun to him," she said. "He's drunk. We sure fed them boys well an' they jes' wukked nuff to pay bo'd. We dunno where they went. They just runned off. Youall mus' find 'em yoh own selves."

"Can't you tell us where they went?" asked Glen.

"It's been two, three days gone," she said. "Tell you what's de trufe. They went up in de

hills. The one what was loony reckoned he knowed his way 'bout. We never hurt 'em none."

"But I'll hurt 'em when I gets mah han's on 'em," bellowed Black Jake, savagely.

"You shet up," said Mandy. "He's drunk. Don't pay no 'tenshun to him," she added. "He's kind when he's sober."

"If he's done anything to hurt those boys he'll pay for it," said Glen.

"I sure will hurt 'em," declared Black Jake again.

"Shet up, you black idjut," shouted Mandy. "You want find yohse'f in jail?"

"I think he'll get there," said Glen. "If you won't tell us anything we'll go now. But if we don't find those boys we'll be back again, and don't you forget it."

He strode boldly around to the back premises, followed by Grubb. In the shelter of a straw-stack he saw Wilson watching. The revenue agent pointed to a wagon that stood in the yard with sideboards on, apparently loaded to the top with white corn. Glen strolled up to it, but saw nothing unusual in its appearance.

The two boys looked all over the premises. The search was easy for there were few places of

concealment. They were soon convinced that both Apple Newton and Sister Clark had been there recently but had now gone. It seemed impossible to get any more information from the negroes, so they went back to where their comrades were concealed, resolved to take up anew the search, and going at it with much more encouragement because of the definite trail they had established.

"They've been there," Glen said to Chick-chick. "Not only Sister Clark but Apple Newton, too. They were there just a few days ago. All we've got to do now is to follow them up a little further."

"Sure the Johnsons haven't got 'em hid away somewhere?" asked Chick-chick.

"Quite sure," said Glen. "We looked everywhere. They haven't any place to hide anything."

"Sure of that?" asked Mr. Wilson quietly as he stepped into the circle. "What was in that wagon I pointed out to you?"

"Why, corn, of course," replied Glen. "Any one could see that."

"Yes, of course there was corn. Also certain corn products. Jake Johnson didn't raise that corn. If you had really examined the wagon you

would have found that the corn hid three big barrels."

"Liquor?" cried Payson. "Contraband! Why didn't you arrest him?"

"We aren't ready yet. Jake is only one of the rascals. He serves the purpose of an underground agent, that's all. I'm going to give him rope until some of the big fellows can go with him. Maybe it'll be to-night; maybe a week from now."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Payson.

"You've already done a great deal," replied Mr. Wilson. "You've made an important find, and it will lead to something more important. Just now I want you to scatter and get to your homes without attracting attention. The thing isn't ripe yet."

"How about us?" asked Glen. "We want to stay here and find these boys."

"You'll do no harm," said Wilson. "The folks expect to see you around. Take good care of yourselves. Remember that Jake Johnson, sober, is much more dangerous than Jake Johnson, drunk."

"Surely he won't try anything on us?"

"I'm not sure that he won't, after he sobers up. But you three boys can take care of yourselves,

I guess. And you won't be staying around here very long."

"We'll stay here until we've made a mighty thorough hunt of this Johnson place, and picked up some trail that'll lead us to the boys we are looking for," said Chick-chick.

"Well, take care of yourselves. That's all. You were lucky this afternoon. You caught Black Jake too drunk to know what he was doing, or you wouldn't have got so much information nor handled him so easily."

"We'll be watching for his tricks, we will," said Chick-chick.

"A thousand thanks to you Scouts for leading us here," said Glen, as Payson and his friends moved away. "We'll come and visit you after we get our boys."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CAVE

LEFT to themselves, the three scouts looked around for a place of concealment, from which they might watch the Johnson shack unobserved.

"I have a feeling that if we wait an' watch that place we'll see something worth while," declared Chick-chick. "It doesn't seem likely to me that Apple could plan to get away, with his head not working right. And we know Sister Clark wouldn't have the nerve."

"So you think they are there yet," said Glen. "I don't see where they could be. I looked around carefully."

"Yes, Brick, but you don't know whether you saw anything or not. The same eyes that couldn't see three big barrels of liquor maybe couldn't see two scared boys."

"We made a great mistake not sending you, Chicken. You see everything."

"Maybe I do, an' maybe I don't. But I reckon

I'm goin' to watch that place, an' I reckon we'll see somethin' worth while yet to-night. Wait till he thinks we've had time to get clear away."

It was a pleasant night, and there was no hardship in lying in the brush watching the cabin. Each of the boys had a lunch in his haversack, and lying there munching at good food was very comfortable work. So comfortable, indeed, that, tired with the events of the day, one by one, they dropped off into sleep.

Glen was the first to awaken. It was quite dark save for the light of the stars and he took a moment to bring himself back to his surroundings. Then his eyes were drawn by something that caused him to kick the other boys into wakefulness sharply.

"Look over there!" he whispered. "Look toward the house! I believe you were right, Chick-chick. There are two boys there as sure as you live. I can't see them very distinctly in this light. But they're too small to be men."

"One of 'em might easily be Apple, by his size," said Chick-chick. "An' the other is Sister Clark."

"You sure of that?" asked Grubb.

"Who else could it be?" replied Chick-chick.

"You said there were no boys around there this afternoon."

"They don't seem dressed right from what I can see from here," objected Grubb.

"How would you expect 'em dressed after roughin' around this wilderness? They're lucky to have any clothes at all."

"They're leaving the house," said Glen. "I believe they're going away."

"We must go after 'em," said Chick-chick. "It's they, sure, Apple and Sister."

"The little one looks awful small for Sister," said Glen. "And he's limping, too."

"That's why he looks small," said Chick-chick. "He's so lame he can hardly walk and it bends him all over. Come on, now. If they get into the woods on the other side the clearing, we may have trouble catching 'em."

"Everybody be as quiet as you can," warned Glen. "Black Jake's had time enough to sober up by now."

It did not seem wise for the boys to expose themselves to the comparative light of the clearing. The two boys whom they sought were going away from them so it became necessary for the chase to rush through the brush and undergrowth skirt-

ing the clearing, at a good pace. All three being expert in woodcraft, they managed this with very little noise.

Their excitement was intense, and when at last they caught a glimpse of the two boys in a small opening in the woods ahead of them, Chick-chick could not restrain a low whistle. The two were now traveling quite leisurely. They did not seem to hear the whistle as they made no stop.

"We must be careful, fellows," whispered Glen. "They aren't expecting us, and in Apple's state of mind it might be a serious thing for him to meet a severe shock. Let Chick-chick go ahead, and we will come up one from each side so if Apple breaks away, as he may if scared, we will be able to stop him."

In this formation they advanced upon the two fugitives. Chick-chick was within speaking distance, and wondering how he should hail them, when suddenly he felt his shoulders gripped by strong arms. Fighting furiously for freedom, he managed to twist around, only to find himself looking up into the hideous face of Black Jake.

Chick-chick, alert to the danger of the situation for his chums, shouted at the top of his voice, "Run, fellows! Get out of this! Run!"

Black Jake grinned at him savagely.

"Dem li'l boys kain't run. So don't holler. Here dey come now. Youall's gwine be togedder."

Through the brush, each of them handled by two men, came Glen and Grubb. They, too, had been taken by surprise and overpowered, before they could put up any resistance.

"I knowed youall gemmens git inter trouble wandrin' thoo dese woods," said Black Jake. "Wha' foh youall follerin mah li'l chilluns. Come heah, chilluns. Dese yeah gemmens wants take look at you, dey been follerin' you so keerful."

Two negro boys came sheepishly forward, grinning at the discomfiture of the white boys whom they had been leading into the trap. One of them limped perceptibly. As the boys looked closer at him, they recognized him as the little rhyming negro with the splinter in his toe and at the same time he probably recognized them, but he made no sign excepting to give a suggestive wink.

The captors of Glen and Grubb were white men and one of them now assumed command of the party.

"Hustle these boys along lively and get 'em

to the wagon," he directed. "We don't want 'em messing around here."

"Who youall talkin' at?" inquired Jake. "I'se runnin' dese yere boys. Ain't it me worked up scheme to ketch 'em?"

"You? You get out o' here with your schemes. You come mighty nigh gettin' us in trouble an' bringing a whole posse down on us. If these boys had showed sense enough to go right back to town an' git the sheriff, where would you be with your schemes? Blow the whole gaff! Now we got to git 'em out o' here right quick. Hustle 'em along to the wagon."

He was obeyed this time and the boys found themselves hustled along a narrow trail through the woods in lively fashion. They soon came to a wagon trail and there they found a rough wagon drawn by a span of mules.

"Climb in here," was the order.

They obeyed without demur, and there began a rough journey along rocky, uphill roads, that lasted well into the night. In spite of their anxiety for their own welfare and that of the two missing boys, and in spite of the roughness of the journey, they dozed off into a stupid condition,

half sleeping and half waking, long before they reached their destination.

They were effectually wakened by being yanked out of the wagon in no gentle manner. They found that a halt had been made in front of an old building that had once been a mill. A group of perhaps a dozen men stood around in earnest discussion with their captors.

"Put the blinders on 'em," said the leader, at last. "We'll put 'em where they'll be safe until we are ready to let 'em go."

Each of the boys was rudely blindfolded, and his hands tied behind his back. Then they were led away over an uneven surface that would have caused many tumbles if they had not had assistance.

At last they ceased to feel the breeze upon their faces and felt that they must have been conducted through a door; but they still went forward for a long time, so long that it seemed impossible that any hall could be so extensive. Then the drip of water came to their ears, and through the handkerchiefs they could see the glare of a burning fire.

Then the bandages were taken from their eyes

and they saw by the light of the fire that they were standing in a subterranean cavern. The drip of water was caused by a stream that seemed to disappear into the earth a few yards away. Around the fire several men were lounging, apparently very secure in their position for they made no effort to restrain the boys after untying their hands.

"Where are we?" asked Glen. "What do you men intend to do with us?"

"You are in a good safe place," replied the leader. "And we intend to keep you here."

"I warn you that we have powerful friends who will leave nothing undone towards finding us. You'll be awfully sorry that you ever troubled us."

"We'd be sorrier if we didn't. We're going to keep you here until our business is over. Then maybe we'll let you go if you behave."

"Have you thought what will happen then?"

"We don't care. We're going to make a big clean-up. And then this country won't know no more of us, nohow. So do your worst."

"If you'll let us go now, and tell us where to find the two boys we are looking for, we will not prosecute for anything that you've done so far."

The men laughed uproariously.

"You don't know where you are, boy. You'll never get outa here without a guide. When we get good and ready, we'll let you have one."

"Do we get anything to eat?" asked Grubb.

"I reckon. We ain't wantin' to starve ye. Set over there."

The boys sat down on a natural ledge running along the floor of the cave and in a short time a negro boy came in bringing them food. It was Friday again.

"The food looks good," said Chick-chick. "But you're a little scamp to be working with this gang."

Friday looked around apprehensively. They were well out of earshot of the men.

"Youall don't need be callin' no names," said the boy. "I don't belong no gang. I'se allowed in yere because I'se a chile an' kain't do no harm to nobody, but I don't b'long to none of 'em."

"Likely story," said Chick-chick. "How's it come you aren't talking in rhyme to-night?"

"Foot hurt all time, can't make no rhyme," replied the boy with a grimace.

"Let me examine that toe," said Grubb. "It

looks bad. If you have a splinter in there you'd better let me take it out."

"Reckon youall couldn't hurt much wuss takin' it out, not much wuss'n it hurts all time."

"I reckon not," said Grubb. "Do you know enough about this place to get a bowl of hot water to soak it?"

"Yes. I knowed 'bout dis place foh eber dese yere men come to it. Dey don't know nuffin 'bout me. Dey let me in 'cause day fink I come with Black Jake, but I ain't belong to him nuther. I reckon if I goes back whar I got dat food I git some hot water."

His guess was correct for he soon returned carrying a bowl of hot water.

Will Grubb carefully bathed the swollen toe. Then he took from a small pocket case a small knife and tissue forceps. A very slight incision, which the boy bore without flinching, revealed an ulgy splinter which was readily removed.

During the slight operation the men in the cave had stood around in good natured approval.

"Reg'lar doctor, ain't he," said one. "I'm going to bring Jim Wells over here an' have him look at his bad arm."

He disappeared and very soon returned with

Jim Wells, a big, muscular man who carried his right arm in a stiff, awkward position.

"I can't use it no way at all," he said. "I reckon it's broke. Got hurt this evenin'."

"Looks to me more like a dislocation," suggested Glen.

"That's what it is," said Grubb, when the man had removed his shirt. "You Scouts know how to hold his shoulder while I pull it back into place?"

"I think we do," said Glen. "We've seen it done."

It was no light job to overcome the muscular resistance of such a man, but after a determined pull the joint came back with a click and Grubb got up from the position he had taken, with a smile of relief.

"That's fine an' dandy," said the relieved patient. "I feel like a new man. It's too bad I kain't let you all out. But say, if any these men don't treat you right, you let me know."

"Maybe you can give us something to sleep on," suggested Grubb.

"Sure can," replied Wells. "I got some blankets you can have an' plenty o' straw. You're welcome to it."

With this material for bedding, the boys drew

off by themselves and prepared to pass the night. They found to their amusement that Friday was preparing to settle down with them.

"What are you doing here?" asked Grubb. "You go where you belong."

"I b'longs right yere," said Friday. "I feels jes' as good to youall as Jim Wells does, an' I'll do moh foh you, 'cause I'll show you de way out. Mah toe feelin' fine now."

"When will you do it?" asked Grubb. "We want to get out of here quickly."

"No good hurry, no good worry. All got to stay yere, till dese men disappear. You let Friday tell ye when. Friday know all 'bout dese men."

The minds of the boys would have been at perfect ease, had it not been for their anxiety to be on the track of Apple Newton and Sister Clark. They wrapped themselves in the borrowed blankets and dropped into a quiet sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECRET TUNNEL

GLEN awoke in the night with a chilly sensation, dreaming that he was in bed at home, with his young brother pulling the covers all over to his side of the bed. He sat up in the darkness and as he realized where he was he also became conscious that Friday was cautioning him to be quiet. By his side were Chick-chick and Grubb in much the same condition.

"Ev'body's sleepin' fine now," said Friday. "Dem guards at de front is awake, foh sure, but we kin git out de back way. Dese white men don't know dey is back way. On'y Friday know it."

It was four o'clock in the morning, as indicated by the illuminated dial of Chick-chick's wrist watch, an hour when the sleep of the watchers was likely to be sound.

"Step right over dis yere pusson," said Friday, indicating the recumbent Wells. "He ain't

wakin'. He plum wore out wid him accident an' sleepin' like a log."

It was true that Wells was sleeping very soundly indeed. No doubt he had been much exhausted by the pain and shock of his accident and now that it was relieved was sleeping heavily.

The boys stepped over his body and followed Friday into the blackness of the cave.

It seemed that they walked for an hour before they reached any stop. It was fearsome business, stepping along in pitch darkness, following a little negro whom they scarcely knew at all, dreading every moment lest they go headlong into some unknown chasm.

"Right here's whar youall stop," announced Friday at last. "I been feelin' foh dis yere place. Now we got to climb an' youall must make yoh cloes into a rope so you'll know how to foller on."

They made a rope of handkerchiefs and belts and Friday started to climb with the white boys following one by one.

"At's de way we fools 'em," said Friday, as they all reached the top and began to follow him along a narrow passage. "Dem white folks, dey foller along but dey won't kotch us cause dey don't

know we climb up yere. Dey don't know dey is a trail up yere. Dey don't know nuffin."

This was very hopeful news, but as they were still in pitchy darkness, going they knew not whither, none of them could feel very enthusiastic at the prospect of deliverance.

"How long are we to keep going in this darkness, Friday?" asked Grubb.

"Wait, you white man, don't you fret; Friday know whar gwine to get. Soon we all git out'n dis gloom, come to nice li'l privut room."

They followed another hundred yards and then Friday stopped.

"Too bad youall mans so big. Squeeze up li'l and foller dis nig," he instructed.

He climbed up about six feet to an aperture in the wall and disappeared. Chick-chick, who was slender, followed at once, and though they could not see him distinctly they very plainly heard him wriggling through.

"I'm through, fellows," he called, from the other side. "It's nice in here, but I don't think you boys will ever make it. Better take off all the clothes you don't need, but leave on enough to protect you from the ragged edges. You come

first, Brick. If you get stuck, I'll pull and Grubb push. Then together we can yank him through."

It was no joking matter to get through that irregular hole. The pulling and pushing were actually necessary. But it was managed at last and the three found themselves lying on the smooth floor of a large chamber, so big that the lighted matches that formed their sole means of illumination failed to reveal its boundaries.

Friday was in great glee over his successful leadership and danced before them in a way that showed no trace of his recent infirmity.

"You seem to feel pretty good about it, Friday," said Grubb. "But I don't see that you've done anything yet excepting to bring us out of one cave into another that is still further away."

"Lie down, white man, finish yoh nap, Friday git you out'n dis trap. Wait till comes de dark o' night, won't nobody see white men git clear out o' sight, nobuddy here but me."

"Isn't it enough dark o' night now?" asked Chick-chick. "Tell us how you're going to do, Friday. Explain yourself in simple language so that poor ignorant people who aren't poets can understand."

"It 'bout like dis. Youall keep on gwine along an' you git out jes' 'bout daylight an' somebuddy sure ketch you. So all's to do is wait yere till dark nex' night. Den Friday show ye out."

"That sounds fine, Friday. But what are we going to do all day while we wait?"

"Jes' lie still right yere. Ef youall goes to movin' 'bout, sombuddy'll hear an' be comin' arter ye. Youall mus' stay right yere."

"But how about something to eat, Friday? It's going to be an awfully long day if we lie here with nothing to eat."

"Leave it all to Friday. Friday am de boy. Friday bring you somep'n nice. Fill you heart wid joy."

"How'll you get it?"

"Gwine right back dis minute. Be back foh anybody knows I ben away. When dey diskiver you is gone I feel bad as bad can be. Den nobuddy won't lay nuffin' on me. When ain't nobuddy lookin', back I comes wid dinner."

When he had gone the three boys discussed him and his conduct in wonder not unmixed with a certain degree of apprehension.

"What's his game?" said Grubb. "A little while ago he was a member of the Jake Johnson

gang deliberately leading us into trouble. Now he poses as our deliverer.''

''I don't think he's posing,'' said Glen. ''He has told us particularly that his being with Johnson was just an accident, that he does not belong to his crowd. When a very simple person gets a feeling of gratitude he may get it very strong. I figure that's the way with Friday. He's grateful for the relief he got for his foot and wants to show it.''

''It might be so,'' agreed Chick-chick. ''You never can always tell. Don't see where he'd get anything leading us off from that crowd unless he gets it from us.''

''He might be leading us off so he could bring another gang to fall on us,'' suggested Grubb.

''You need somebody to fall on you for ideas of that kind,'' said Chick-chick. ''Come on, Brick. Let's smother him.''

The two boys rolled over on the ex-guide in a lively though not noisy scuffle. When they had exhausted their energy in this way, they became quiet again, and it was not strange that they all dropped asleep. They were awakened by the return of Friday bringing some food and a can of water.

"Friday bring yoh bread an' meat, ain't no fancy food. When yoh kain't git much to eat, it goes mighty good," he announced.

The boys divided it carefully into two portions, for the little negro assured them that it would not be possible to get more that day. He did not stay with them but slipped away as quietly as he had come.

It was a long morning. The gloom of the cavern was lightened a mere trifle at daybreak. Fortunately Glen's watch had been left to him and was running. It was consulted an amazing number of times, but gave so little satisfaction that Chick-chick and Grubb declared that such a watch was absolutely unreliable, and even the owner began to wonder if he had injured the works in crawling through the tunnel.

However, they waited until the watch registered twelve o'clock before they ate the remainder of their food, though Chick-chick was positive that the watch was at least six hours slow. After they had cleared away every fragment of food they attempted sleep again, without much success.

The afternoon dragged terribly.

"I don't believe that little darkey's ever coming back," declared Chick-chick. "I think now

this is all a scheme. These moonshiners didn't want kill us. Wanted nice, easy way get rid of us. Get little darkey lead us off in place where we can't get out an' can't get back. That's what they've done. Bet you five cents we're lost."

"You're talking nonsense, Chicken," said Glen.

"Doesn't sound so much like nonsense to me," said Grubb.

"You fellows make me weary. You make my watch ashamed to tick its way on. Here it isn't four o'clock yet and you begin to bring charges against little Friday. He told you we couldn't move until night because it wouldn't be safe. Why can't you wait?"

But when the watch showed six o'clock, and still no sign of Friday, even Glen began to be a little doubtful, and at last he agreed to Chick-chick's proposal that they take advantage of the faint daylight that existed to pick their way carefully along toward the supposed opening of the cavern.

They did not know how the light reached the cave. It was hardly fair to call it light. It was simply a little relief from the inky blackness that had marked the night, a little thinning of the gloom. It was enough to keep them from running full tilt into sharp edges and projections and to

save them from stepping off into deep pools of water.

The boys worked their way cautiously around and surveyed the large chamber in which they had spent the day.

"The only way out is this little bit hole," said Chick-chick. "I'm afraid it's the same hole we got in at. What ye think, Brick?"

"No, it isn't the same hole," decided Glen. "I nearly stuck fast in that hole, but from the looks of this one, I shall have no trouble. I'll go first."

"You won't do nothin' o' the kind," declared Chick-chick. "Whose hole is this, I want to know? Who found it? I go first and you follow."

He disappeared head first and Glen followed. They were in a narrow passage, on their hands and knees. For a time it seemed gradually to narrow down upon them. Glen began to feel that he would be obliged to crawl back, when at last he heard Chick-chick cry out ahead of him:

"It's all right. Keep on comin'. It's big enough so I can stand an' gettin' bigger."

As the passage broadened out it seemed also to get lighter. Soon the boys were able to stand erect and found sufficient light to see their foot-

ing. It began to be easy walking and they pushed ahead in great excitement.

"Don't be rash there, boys," cautioned Grubb. "Remember that you can't afford to come out of this cave in broad daylight. You might run right into the hands of some watchers."

"We'll go carefully," said Glen. "It will be dark in another hour or so. We can wait that long. But we may as well push along so far as we have good cover."

There were many twists and turns in the cavern and at every one they came more into daylight.

"Steady now, boys," said Glen. "Here's where we do some real scouting. We don't want to—"

"You don't want to spill the beans," added Chick-chick. "You let me go first, Brick. I'm the lightest on my feet."

"Lightest in your head, you mean, Chicken. We'll do this way. I'll go fifty yards with great caution. You two stay here. If all O. K., I will signal and you two will join me. Then it will be your turn at the same plan."

It was an old scout trick with which both Chick-chick and Grubb were perfectly familiar. It hindered progress but added greatly to safety.

They went along in this way until the cave became so light that they expected every moment to reach an opening.

Glen was ahead. The two boys behind saw that he was warning them to come on very cautiously.

They joined him and in the shadow of a great pillar the three stood looking out to the mouth of the cavern and broad daylight.

But between them and liberty stood two men, who, unconscious of their presence, were working over a small fire, preparing their evening meal.

CHAPTER XVII

CAPTURING THE KIDNAPPERS

CAUTIOUSLY the boys withdrew into places of concealment that they might better watch the proceedings of the men who occupied the front of the cave. They were cooking supper or attempting to do so, but making poor weather of it. Their fire was improperly built, and they scorched and smoked their faces in frantic efforts to cook some small animal that they had secured.

"Amateurs!" whispered Chick-chick. "Why don't they learn something in this country?"

"They don't belong in these parts," objected Grubb. "The men who live in these hills are all professionals."

Suddenly Friday stole into the group.

"What I tell youall white boys?" he whispered, holding up an admonishing finger in a solemn manner. "I done tole youall trubble was comin'. Git back outa yere now, whar dey kain't heah nuffin."

They withdrew to a safe distance for their discussion.

"Those two fellows can't do anything to us, Friday," said Chick-chick. "They don't know we are here, and we can rush 'em an' tie 'em up before they have time to wonder what's happening."

"If their cooking is any sign, they ought to be easy," said Grubb. "Brick could handle them alone."

"Brick doesn't propose to try," said Glen. "What if we got past them and found another nest outside? I say go carefully. We want to get free from here so we can go out and find Sister Clark and Apple Newton. We can afford to wait until dark, in fact we can't afford not to."

"I'm awful hungry," said Chick-chick, "but I'll wait."

The wait did not seem so long this time. They were diverted to some extent by watching the antics of the amateur campers who could not even boil a can of water properly. It grew quite dark. The two men in front of the cave lay down on a pile of brush to sleep. And still no one else came.

"Now's the time," said Glen. "You and

Grubb take the one on the left, Chicken. With Friday to help me I'll try to handle the one on the right. Have a gag ready and don't allow any noise. Steal up quietly. All right. Let's go!"

It was absurdly easy. In less than five minutes the two men were securely trussed and gagged. They were unable to make any outcry and did not seem to have even enough spirit to glare.

"What's the matter with these ginks?" asked Chick-chick. "Talk about your bandits! Our man would have been easy meat for Sister Clark."

"Mine was just the same," said Glen. "Looks as if he was half starved."

"Maybe they ain't bandits," suggested Chick-chick. "Maybe they're lost missionaries."

"Missionaries nothing!" snorted Grubb. "Look at their faces." He threw on some dry wood and stirred up the fire so as to make the inspection easy.

It was enough. It was more than enough. As Glen studied the face of his captive he gave a shout of surprise.

"What's matter?" asked Chick-chick. "Found some one you know?"

"I should say I have. Found some one we all

know, but I think I know best of all. See these holes where the teeth ought to be?''

''Must be the guy that blocked Mattie's fist,'' guessed Chick-chick.

''You're right it is,'' agreed Glen. ''Also as I look at him I feel sure that he is the fellow who dropped that knife. You remember I found a knife with a name scratched on it.''

''Sure do,'' agreed Chick-chick. ''Things look interestinger. We want this bird to tell us what he did with Sister Clark.''

''Suppose you and Grubb explore around the entrance a little. If you don't find any one within calling distance we'll take out this man's gag and let him talk.''

Glen waited only for the two boys to leave the cave when he at once removed the gag, first warning his captive that any outcry would bring immediate punishment.

''Do you know me, Nixy?'' he asked quietly.

The man stared up at him in amazement.

''Who are you?'' he cried. ''It's a long time since I've been called by that name.''

''Think! Think back to the days when you were a very long, thin hungry boy called Nixy.''

''There never was a day when I was hungrier

than I am now," said the man. "But I know who you are, now you speak of those days. You're changed every way anybody could think of, but there's something about you tells me who you are. You're Mason, but you're as different from what you used to be as black is from white."

"I hope I am," said Glen. "I fell into the hands of some mighty good friends who helped make a man of me. I'm afraid you didn't have as good luck."

"I didn't. I've never had any luck," said Nixy. "I have been in all kinds of meanness, though I've managed to keep out of the hands of the law, ever since I left the school. I'm not called Nixon now, but I've got an ambition to go back to the name."

"What do you mean?" asked Glen.

"I mean what I say. You ain't the only one as had good folks. My mother and father's dead but Grandmother Nixon is just as good as anybody. That's why I changed my name to Jones and everybody calls me Jones."

"And why do you now want to go back to Nixon?"

"You wouldn't ask no such question if you knowed what we been through this last week.

We been in these mountains, plumb lost. They's a few folks whose houses we found, but some way they got the notion we was revenue officers. They chased us off with guns an' if we hadn't run acrost this cave they'd a got us. We snared a rabbit or a squirrel now an' then, but neither one of us could cook an' so we been pretty nigh starved to death. We been in here an' not able to get out an' we're pretty near all in. I tell you we need help."

"And you think that for the sake of getting help you'd be willing to be decent?"

"That's right," said Nixy. "Kick a man when he's down. That reminds me some of Glen Mason."

"I'm ashamed of myself," said Glen. "I'm going to take the gag out of your mate's mouth, and then I want you both to sit up and tell me what you did with Sister Clark."

At that moment Chick-chick and Grubb returned, in time to hear the last words.

"Yes, tell us what you did with Sister Clark!" they chimed in.

"What d'ye mean, Sister Clark?" asked Nixon. "He the boy that we took away from you?"

"He decidedly was," said Chick-chick. "And it's just as well for you to acknowledge it."

"I ain't tryin' not to acknowledge it," asserted Nixon. "I jes' got through tellin' ye I was tryin' to be straight. But say, you didn't orter charge us up with nothin' on that kid. He's the one as got us in all this trouble!"

"What do you mean? Sister Clark couldn't get you into trouble."

"Couldn't, eh? You know what that kid did?"

"No. We don't know anything after he left us."

"I wish you'd kept him an' tooken better care of him," said Nixon.

"Explain yourself. I know we ought to have taken better care of the poor little chap. But why do you wish it?"

"Poor little chap! Poor little chap!!" repeated Nixon in rising tones of contempt. "I'll jes' tell you what your 'poor little chap' done to us. He took our car an' everything in it an' got clear away with it. That's what your 'poor little chap' done!"

There was a moment of stupefied silence. Then the three boys united in a roar of laughter that even their perilous position could not suppress.

"Good for Sister Clark!" exclaimed Chick-chick. "They kidnapped him and he ran away

with their car. It's really too good to be true."

"It sounds funny to you, I'll bet," said Nixon. "It wasn't a bit funny to us. That car belonged to my partner's uncle an' it had been borrowed without givin' any receipt for it. The more we hunted for it the deeper we got into these woods an' the less the people seemed to like us. That's why we ain't had nothin' to eat for about a week an' why we're weaker'n cats."

"I'm willin' to vote to let you go if ye'll tell us how the boy did it," said Chick-chick.

"I don't know myself," said Nixon. "We didn't even know he could run a car. We left him in it, with the nose of the engine pointing in to the brush an' him cryin' his eyes out, we thought. We went off a little piece an' all of a sudden we heard that engine an' there the little devil was shovin' her clear through the brush at top speed. The last we saw he was goin' at a forty mile clip down a road that was dangerous to do four on."

"When we see that old boy again, I'm goin' to clap him on the back an' call him 'Brother,'" said Chick-chick.

"I'm not," said Glen. "I've got used to Sister now and I have an affection for the name, and

I'll bet he has too. But what'll we do with these fellows?''

''Give us a chance,'' pleaded Nixon. ''Before ever you found us we'd both decided to be on the square. If you'll let us get away from here and start off into a white man's country we'll go straight. We've had our lesson.''

''I think I can speak for the crowd,'' said Glen. ''We're Scouts and 'a Scout is Generous.' It may not be easy for any of us to get away from here, for the moonshiners are after us, too. But we'll sink or swim together.''

''I don't think it's going to be so very hard,'' said Grubb. ''While we were outside looking around, I climbed to the top of a big pine and got a line on some landmarks. Where shall we head for?''

''I'm very anxious to find the boys,'' said Glen. ''After Sister got away he must have left the machine very soon because there isn't any question in the world but that he was at Black Jake's place, and I think Apple with him. But they've left there.''

''Yes, and they may have got to town,'' said Chick-chick. ''I want to find 'em too. But reckon we got another duty first. Remember the Moun-

tain Scouts and how they sidetracked their business to help us in our hunt for the boys?"

"I surely do," said Glen. "I'll never forget 'em."

"Then I reckon the first thing for us is to find Doctor Gray and the Troop and tell 'em how to locate this cave. Once they get it the moonshining in this country will be at an end."

"I believe you're right," agreed Glen. "We must find the Mountain Troop and give them the information we've stumbled upon. And then we'll make a grand search for Sister Clark and Apple Newton. Do you think you can take us to Doctor Gray's place, Grubb?"

"Good clear night. Stars shine bright; Friday guide you 'long all right," piped up a member of the party whom they had been ignoring.

"You think you can, Friday?"

"Friday nebber do much thinkin'. Friday take you quick as winkin'," responded the boy.

"All right, Friday. Lead the way!" directed Grubb. One by one they crept out of the cave into the starlit night.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE WAY OUT

SISTER CLARK sat in the sunlit entrance of his cave on the morning of the eleventh day thinking that they simply *must* get away that day, let the ankle pain as it might. Apple came rushing along in unusual excitement, his eyes big with news that he had to tell.

"We can get away in it, but I can't tell you what it is," was all he would say to Sister's questions. "I know the name but can't speak it. It's about a mile. Will you try it?"

Sister scrambled over that mile, under the stimulus of excitement, at almost a normal rate of speed. He guessed what he would find.

There lay the little roadster, in the ravine in which it had tumbled. It was almost hidden by brush, and lay far below the wagon track along which it had come. Darkness had hidden its trail from the men who sought it, and before the darkness had passed the severe storm had washed away

every track. There it lay just as Sister Clark had left it.

"We must get her up," said Sister. "I didn't suppose we were so near here. I know how to get out now. There's an old wagon-road top o' that bank. We can follow it clear out to the highway. Let's hurry."

It was no hurry job, but Apple Newton was a mighty help, and before noon Sister was cautiously driving back to the main road.

Oh, but it seemed good to be again in such comparative safety! When they reached the highway, and once more began to see signs of civilization Sister could not contain his joy, but shouted and sang in excitement.

They traveled two hours before seeing a solitary individual. Then it was a boy trying to drive two refractory pigs. From him they learned that six miles south lay a town.

"What is a town?" asked Apple.

"Don't bother your head about it," replied Sister. "You'll know when you get there just like you knew about this car, only couldn't tell the name of it. I don't suppose it will be much of a town."

"I begin to remember a lot of things," said

Apple. "Sometimes it seems as if I were just about ready to have everything come back with a rush. A lot of things are just on my tongue, names and ideas and things, and then they slip back just as I get ready to say them."

"Don't worry," said Sister. "You get something new every day, and when you do get it you don't let go. Do you remember Glen Mason?"

"No, it's just a name to me."

"You're going to remember all right, just as soon as you see him. I'll bet he and Chick-chick are hunting every place for us right now."

"Why would they?"

"Because they started in to do it and they're the kind that never quit. They're Scouts, they are."

"You're a Scout, too."

"Yes, but not like them. I'm just a learner. You know they call me 'Sister.'"

"I don't. I call you 'Brother.' You're the one that pulled me out."

"It's the first time in my life anybody was able to say that about me. But you'll learn when we all get together that I didn't have much to do with it. I just tumbled on you by chance. The reason I got the chance was because I acted the fool and

got kidnapped. I'm a pretty looking hero—not!''

Apple looked at him gravely and steadily.

''No, you are not pretty,'' he said. ''You have nothing on that is not torn to pieces. Your hair is not as long as mine, but it is too long. Your toes peep through your shoes and the shoe on the bad ankle is cut in two. Since you made me take your coat it shows that your vest has only one button on it. No, you are not pretty, but you are brave.''

Sister Clark blushed.

''You don't know how glad I feel to hear you say that even if it isn't so,'' he said. ''I would rather be brave than anything in the world, but I've always had such a horror of getting hurt that it's awful hard for me to show any bravery. I expect I am a terrible sight, but you—''

''What do I look like?''

''You look like The Wild Man of the Woods.''

''It doesn't make any difference.''

''Not if we can find Glen Mason and the friends who are looking for us. But if we run into a strange town where nobody knows us, and we look like we do now, we are likely to be arrested on suspicion.''

"You will know how to manage, Brother," said Apple, confidently.

Sister Clark smiled.

"I believe the best plan will be to go direct to the town, but stop the car at some quiet place just outside and leave it there while we go in and go direct to the authorities and tell our story. That won't look so bad for us as if we drove in and were arrested for stealing the car and then tried to explain afterwards."

"All right. Drive right on to the town then!"

"We'll hope we won't meet anybody on the way. This road is getting to look like a pretty well traveled pike."

"We will hope we won't meet any one," agreed Apple, "and we'll try to see that nobody overtakes us."

But a little later, as they topped a hill, they saw, a long distance back of them, a fine, large touring car.

"They'll catch us up before we reach that town," said Sister.

"Let's hurry," said Apple, anxious for the first time. "I don't want to be seen like this."

He was indeed a wonderful sight, and so, in a little less degree, was Sister Clark.

"We certainly aren't fixed for company," agreed Sister. "We must get to that town and get fixed up."

He pressed his foot on the accelerator and the little car quickened its speed perceptibly. But in a few moments Apple looked back and saw the big touring car coming over the rise.

"They're catching up," he said. "Let her out a little more, Brother."

"Looks almost like they were chasing us," said Sister. "Tell you what I'll do. There's a lane just ahead. I'll turn off and let them pass."

He reached the lane and turned, with the touring car close behind.

"Stop there!" shouted a vigorous voice from the big car, and a pistol shot gave emphasis to the command. "Stop! You are under arrest!"

CHAPER XIX

"GO TO DEVIL'S HOLE"

NEITHER Glen nor Chick-chick will ever forget their night journey to the headquarters of the Mountain Scouts. Along winding trails Friday led them. They climbed hills that looked insurmountable, they bridged chasms that looked impassable, they threaded underbrush that appeared impenetrable, they descended cliffs that seemed to be a sheer drop off. Many times they doubted Friday's leading. Time and again did Chick-chick declare that he was simply rambling on without purpose. But in the early dawn they stood on a well built highway and faced the residence of Doctor Gray.

"He won't be up yet," said Glen. "Shall we disturb him?"

"You can't disturb a doctor," said Chick-chick. "It's mighty important to get this gang busted up and one hour might be precious."

So they called the doctor out of bed and began

their story. He whistled and Scout Payson appeared rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"We must pass the word, Payson," said the doctor. "You know how to do it."

"I sure do," responded the scout and was gone in a flash.

The sun was still hesitating about rising when Scout Payson returned with five more Mountain Scouts.

"What's the orders, Doctor?" asked the patrol leader.

"We want forty good men to surround this cave," said the doctor. "These boys have come back to us and told us about the place like the good scouts they are. I'm convinced that it is the very spot to catch the whole gang and break them up. I will get in touch with the sheriff. You boys get six men each from a list I'll give you. Then, to-night shall be the time."

"You'll count us in on this, Doctor," said Glen.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said the doctor. "Your share of the work is done. Your business is to go to bed and sleep for two days and nights. This boy Friday knows the country so well that we may take him for a guide, but we'll carry him by

wagon trail most of the way and he can sleep as he goes."

"Sir, I would like to be one of that posse," said a new voice. It was the man Nixon.

For reply the doctor gave him a good-natured shove that caused him to stagger across the room.

"That's my answer," said the doctor. "You're all in. You'd be in the way. There are three beds upstairs and two in the barn. Now, get into them."

The boys saw the point and turned to their beds, but Chick-chick, Glen and Grubb went away strong in the belief that they would sleep a couple of hours and then be ready for the raid.

When Glen awoke the sun was shining brightly. He remembered the situation at once and looked eagerly around to see if his companions were ahead of him. Grubb and Chick-chick were still in bed, so he dashed some cold water into their faces and brought them to with a start.

"Wake up, fellows!" he shouted. "The sun's high yet and I believe we'll be in time to go on that raid."

"Great Benjamin Rush, but I'm tired!" said Grubb. "I believe I could sleep a week."

"So could I," echoed Chick-chick. "And then another week."

"You're fine scouts to get tuckered out by a little expedition like that of last night," said Glen. "Of course, if you don't want to go—"

The boys were out of bed and jumping into their clothes at once. They ran to the street, but no one was in sight excepting a couple of old men who were quite evidently unfit to be members of a posse.

"Where's the sheriff's posse?" asked Glen quickly.

"They ain't got back yet," said one of the old men.

"Back!" exclaimed Glen. "We didn't suppose they'd started yet."

"They didn't make no noise about goin'!" said the old man. "Went mighty quiet an' mysterious, they did. But I knew jes' when they left, jes' afore sundown last evenin'!"

"Last evening!" exclaimed the boys.

"Jes what I said," the old man replied. "An' they callated to git back early this mornin', but they won't be in no great hurry comin' back. Youall boys is the ones as brought the news, ain't ye?"

"Yes," said Glen. "We thought we'd get up early and—"

"We thought," interrupted Chick-chick, "we thought we'd get up early and see 'em come back."

"Youall is plenty early," said the old man. "It ain't much mo'n nine o'clock yet, an' it's mo'n likely them fellers won't git here befoh noon. They ain't no rush 'bout comin' back. If they ain't successful it don't make no diffunce, an' if they is they need plenty o' time to bring in their haul. Jes' as I said, 'tain't hardly nine o'clock yet."

The boys needed no explanation. They had slept through day and night and started on another day. It was a well-earned sleep but disappointing.

Sitting in the shade of the barn they saw Nixon.

"Any word yet?" he asked.

"Nothing yet," said Glen. "The old man thinks they won't be back until noon."

"I wanted to go with 'em," said Nixon. "I woke up before they started, but the Doctor wouldn't let me go. I'm all broke up waitin' a chance to show I'm some good."

"You'd have done some good if you'd woke us up," suggested Chick-chick.

"It sure would have been real work," admitted Nixon. "I looked in at you an' you was all lost so dead I could have pulled all yer wisdom teeth an' you'd never knowed it."

Glen laughed, but Grubb put his hand in his pocket.

"Ye don't have no need to do that," said Nixon. "If I'd wanted, I could have took all you had an' got far enough away, but I didn't want. I've quit, I tell you."

"We know you have," said Glen. "And we all believe in you. I do. Don't you, Grubb?"

"I surely do," said Grubb. "That motion to my pocket was foolishness. How about you, Chick-chick?"

"I believe in him, sure thing," said Chick-chick. "If he was younger we'd make him a Scout, we would."

Their discussion was interrupted by signals of excitement from the old men down the road.

"They're a comin'!" cried one, waving his hand excitedly. "They're a comin' an' b'lieve me, they got some loot."

It was indeed a great procession that wound its way into the little town. The sheriff's posse, greatly augmented by late volunteers, guarded

thirty prisoners, prominent among them being Black Jake. Several wagon loads of distilling apparatus, of vats and barrels, and of liquor, were in evidence to show the completeness of the raid. Riding in triumph on the very first wagon was little Friday, his countenance beaming with a realization of his importance. The days of moonshining in Brimstone County were ended.

As soon as Doctor Gray appeared the boys hastened to offer their congratulations.

"It's another bull's-eye for the Boy Scouts," declared Doctor Gray. "Our Mountain Scouts had been working this up for a long time. You visiting Scouts were lucky enough to drop on to the clew we needed, and loyal enough to see that we got it at once, and the thing is a great success. I feel fine about it."

"I've got to find the two lost boys," said Chick-chick.

"That's what you have," said the doctor. "How do you plan to continue your search?"

"We expect some help out of this raid," said Glen. "You have captured Jake Johnson. We have positive proof that the two boys were at his place not so very long ago, and we're going to try to make him tell where they went."

"He's a tough character," said the doctor. "But he may tell you the truth if he thinks he will gain anything by it."

But Black Jake had no intention of telling the truth, for he did not think he would gain anything by it. He knew very well that the bald information that the two boys had escaped from him some ten days ago would win nothing for him. He was a shrewd negro and his cunning mind evolved a plan that he thought might lead him to liberty.

"Yasseh, I had dem two lil white boys, I shuah did. I treated 'em jes' same as if dey was black, lak mah own chillun." He gave a cunning laugh as he said this.

"No, seh, I kain't tell youall whah dem lil boys am. I kain't tell nobuddy. But youall jes' lemme go long wid dese yere boys an' I shuah lead youall to zactly de spot."

The sheriff standing by overheard Jake's offer and laughed.

"Think you'll get away, do you, Jake?" he said. "Nothing doing. If you know where those boys are you name the place and I'll send for them."

Jake became sulky and shut his lips in an emphatic negative.

"Better think that over a minute, Jake John-

son," said the sheriff. "If there's anything you can do to whiten up your past record you'd better do it."

The big negro did not answer at once, but after a few more moments of hesitation, he said sulkily: "Go to Devil's Hole for 'em." He would say nothing more.

It seemed that Devil's Hole was rather difficult to reach. It was an ill-favored place. There were no human habitations within two miles of it. The sheriff warned the boys that they must not put too much confidence in Black Jake's statement. He might name this place simply because it was a danger spot. They must be prepared to defend themselves from possible attack by members of the Johnson gang, who were still at large.

"I think we are pretty safe," said Glen. "There are five of us and, now that we are rested, we are able to give a good account of ourselves."

"Much 'bliged for countin' us in," said Nixon. "We sure want to do what we can. You lead on an' they ain't no place we won't foller. We started this thing an' we'll try to square up by a proper finish."

They waited only for Will Grubb to secure directions. Then they ran the Overfordarrowpack out

of the barn and went to say good-by to Doctor Gray.

"Remember now, I'm depending upon you to come back and tell me all about it."

CHAPTER XX

SAFE AT LAST

SISTER CLARK did not need the zip of the bullet to make him bring his car to a standstill. Too bewildered to be frightened, he shut off his engine, and, together with Apple Newton, turned for a better look at the pursuers, who were drawing alongside in threatening haste.

"Why, it's the sheriff!" ejaculated Sister Clark.

"Why, it's Mister—Mister—Mister Burton!" cried Apple.

"These can't be the thieves," said the gentleman whom Apple addressed as Mr. Burton.

"The little one is the boy who was with your boy at the fair," said the sheriff.

"The other fellow seems to know me," said Mr. Burton. "But I can't believe it's a mutual acquaintance. What's your name, young man?"

"Tell him, Brother," said Apple.

"He is Corliss Newton," said Sister. "The boy for whom we have been searching."

"And what has become of Matt?" asked Mr. Burton.

Sister's face clouded with an expression of anxiety.

"Oh, dear," he exclaimed, "I do hope there's nothing happened to Matt. I supposed you'd know all about him."

"I don't know anything," said Mr. Burton. "Two days ago I returned from Europe. I heard that Matt had gone on a trip. Then I found waiting for me an old letter from the sheriff, telling me that a couple of thieves were tracking you boys."

"I wrote it to him when I got the postal that one of you sent me," explained the sheriff.

"I took the next train to see him," continued Mr. Burton, "and I was glad to be able to get him to come with me to follow this thing up. We got this car and came right on. Several people have told us of seeing the two men in this little car a couple of weeks ago. When we sighted the car we thought you were the men."

"Tell him how we came by the car," suggested Apple.

In much confusion Sister told the story of his escape, his finding Apple and their regaining the car.

"Then you haven't seen the other boys for a couple of weeks?" asked Mr. Burton.

"Not since I was carried off," replied Sister.

"But we have positive word that they were seen within a few miles of this place as late as last evening," said Mr. Burton. "Can it be that you were the ones who were seen, instead?"

"Nobody could have seen us last evening," objected Sister. "We were safe in our cave."

"Then we may hope that we are within a short distance of the rest of the boys," said Mr. Burton, with rising cheer. "Devil's Hole was the place they said, Mr. Sheriff. This guide will know how to take us there, I judge."

"It's 'bout two miles by road an' then two miles more," said the man who was acting as guide. "When we gits to whar we kain't go no furder we all must hoof it quite a piece."

"Follow along, boys," said the sheriff. "We'll be on the way before dark comes."

The two miles they could travel by automobile lengthened into three very tedious, up and down miles. At times the road led through a soft shale, but more often it was a journey over sharp flint. Not a sign of human habitation was seen. It looked as if the road to Devil's Hole was one that

might well be a favorite with bandits and kidnappers.

"Here's all the furder we c'n go," at last the guide announced. "Ev'ybuddy mus' git out now an' travel on the hoof."

"I'm not sure that I can travel a mile on the hoof," remarked Sister to Apple. "My ankle is some rested, but it doesn't feel much like hiking."

"We'll stay here until they come back," decided Apple, promptly.

"No need of your staying," objected Sister. "Aren't you anxious to see Brick Mason and Chick-chick?"

"Yes, I am," Apple admitted. "After all you've said to me, I'm awfully anxious to see 'em. I can't call 'em to mind yet, but from the way I knew Mr. Burton, I feel positive I will, and I'm just awfully anxious. But an hour or two won't make much difference. You're my best friend and chum, now; and I'm going to stay here with you."

"You're going to do nothing of the kind," insisted Sister. "I'll stay here alone and you hurry along after those men."

And he had his way. A great testimony it was to the development the last two weeks had wrought in Sister Clark. Two weeks ago he could not

have been left alone in the solitude of the desolate woods. Now he was making it his own choice and doing it with a certain measure of tranquillity. Apple as he hastened away did not hear the boy whisper to himself, "God's over us."

And so it happened that, after all, Sister Clark was the first one of the party to see his missing comrades, and it happened, too, that he was invested with a very important function—no less than that of judge.

The boys came tramping along in exactly the opposite direction from that in which the search party had gone, some half an hour later. When they saw the two cars they gave a great shout, and when they saw Sister Clark, two of them rushed forward with a wild hurrah. These two, of course, were Glen and Chick-chick, and they bestowed upon Sister just the kind of a welcome that he had envied Chick-chick, when Glen and he first met.

When Sister at last found a moment to look at the other three, he was dumb with surprise. One he did not know at all, but the other two were the very men who had tried to run away with him.

"I don't wonder you look surprised," remarked Glen. "We'll have to tell you about it."

"Let's do mor'n that, Brick," said Chick-chick. "Sister was put to a lot of trouble and hard times because of these men. Now let's make him the judge. We'll let 'em go or not, just as he says."

"Wait a bit, Sister," continued Glen. "Don't speak until I tell you about things. We found these men over a week ago, nearly starved out. They were trying to cook a squirrel and making hard work of it. We tackled them and they gave right up. As a matter of fact they aren't many years older than we—just boys. I discovered that one of them—the one that left his teeth at the fair grounds—was an old mate of mine, long, long ago. He hasn't met good friends as I have, and has gone steadily down. The other one was new to their kind of life and disgusted with it. I had a long talk with my old mate. What d'ye think happened? They started right out to help us hunt you and Apple and have been faithful ever since. Last night the leader came to me. What d'ye think he brought?"

"It couldn't have been Matty's watch?" guessed Sister.

"That's just what it was," said Glen. "Said he was going to be square from now on, and when he earned it, he would send back the money, too."

"That sounds pretty square," said Sister.

"It did to us," Glen agreed. "We had a clew that led us to Devil's Hole and we were all going to it, feeling mighty down-hearted, but hoping you would be found. We thought we'd just let these two fellows go their way. But it's up to you, Sister. You're the one who suffered and you're the one to judge."

Sister looked at his friends with a new light in his eyes.

"What makes you think I've suffered?" he asked.

He limped over to where the guide and the two outcasts stood all unconscious of the argument.

"Does that little car honestly belong to you fellows?" he asked.

"It belongs to my uncle," replied the younger kidnapper.

"It's a good little car," said Sister. "It's just about as good as when I ran away with it, and there's a few gallons of gas in it yet. This big fellow is a seven passenger. It'll have to carry Brick and Chick-chick and Apple and the two guides and Mr. Burton and me—that's seven; and then there's the sheriff, too. He's with our

crowd, you know; that sheriff who was at the fair. I believe I'd be on my way if I were you. He'll be back any minute."

The older man looked at Sister Clark with eyes that spoke gratitude.

"Shake hands, son," he requested. "It's the hand of an honest man, from this on. After what we done to you—why—you're just the finest kind."

When the two men had gone the boys anxiously awaited the coming of Apple Newton. Much depended upon the meeting. Would he know his old chums? If he did, surely it would mean that all was well with him again, that his mind was fully restored, that he was ready to resume the thread of life at the place where it had snapped.

"Let's make it a fair trial," suggested Sister. "He's expecting you fellows to be somewhere in this country, so he'll be on the lookout. Let him see the guide first. Then let him see Brick, and then his old chum, Chick-chick."

It was all agreed, and great was the tension when at last they heard the approach of the search party. Apple was in the lead, disappointed at their failure and anxious for the welfare of Sister.

Sister Clark hobbled towards him with the guide supporting him.

Apple cast one keen glance at the young guide, and then turned his gaze to Sister.

"Nothing but disappointment," he said. "But we won't give up. For a moment I thought this boy might be—but he's too old and he isn't—"

Then Glen strode out from behind the big car, coming impetuously toward them, and in a moment the whole state of affairs was changed. Not a vestige of doubt lingered in the eyes of the lost boy as their aspect changed from tired disappointment to glorified joy. He ran forward to Glen and threw his arms around him in a tremendous hug, such as could only come naturally from one with the great heart of Apple Newton.

"Oh, Brick!" he shouted, happy tears standing in his eyes. "Brick Mason! My old scout partner! Oh, you don't know—you never can tell how glad I am to see you!"

No need for Chick-chick to remain secluded for a further test. He saw how matters stood, and in a flash he was receiving his own welcome, joining in the glorious ratification of the reunited triangle.

It was too solemn an occasion for any one to stand a staring onlooker. Sister and the young

guide stepped away. The others of the party, arriving, stopped in quiet contemplation.

Mr. Burton, disappointed at Matt's absence, was yet greatly relieved to hear of his safety. He was anxious to push on to Doctor Newton's Sanatorium, but they were obliged to spend one more night in the woods.

Chick-chick and Glen had left the Overfordarrowpack about half a mile distant, to take a short cut through the woods, and avoid some exceedingly bad road. They now went after it and soon rejoined the party. On the following morning the big car and the Overfordarrowpack rolled into the grounds of the Sanatorium.

"I want to see my son without a minute's delay," said Mr. Burton to the doctor.

"He's right in the middle of his morning's work," objected the doctor. "He's very busy. He's just doing fine work. Come up and see him at it."

They reached the big hydrotherapy room without attracting attention, and stood behind a curtain.

Matt, his muscular form showing to splendid advantage in the snug drapery of a bathing suit, was handling an enormous patient almost double

his weight. He eased him down carefully to the table, drew the folds of the pack around him with precision, skillfully tucked in the ends, and swathed the head with a cold compress.

"To think of Matt doing that!" whispered Mr. Burton.

"It's great," said the guide. "It's my business, but I couldn't have done that much better."

If first greetings had been glorious there is scarcely left a word descriptive of that which now resulted, for not only was Matt meeting his old chum Apple, and the lost boy, Sister Clark, but also his own father, whose pride both at his sacrifice and his accomplishment knew no bounds.

"Certainly you shall study medicine if you so desire," Mr. Burton assured him. "And if you want to have Corliss with you, I shall be delighted to have the opportunity of helping him go through college."

Doctor Newton offered no objection. He was glad to see his nephew Corliss back again, in his right mind, but much more relieved that the excitement would now be over and his much beloved sanatorium be in no further danger of losing time and service.

The afternoon train from the little town would

carry Mr. Burton, Matt, Apple and Glen on their way to Kansas City.

By the station platform waited the Overford-arrowpack, also ready to start on its journey.

"Don't you really think, Henry," argued Mr. Burton, "that you would do well to travel with us and let me ship your car by freight?"

"No, sir," said Chick-chick. "It'd hurt its feelings so never'd get over it. Besides, I promised Doctor Gray I'd come and help him, an' that's what Grubbsey and Sister and I'm goin' to do."

"Well, let Sister come with us, anyway," urged Matt.

"Nothing doing," said Chick-chick. "We're goin' on a big job, we are. It's a man's job, an' Sister's just the man we need to help us."

THE END

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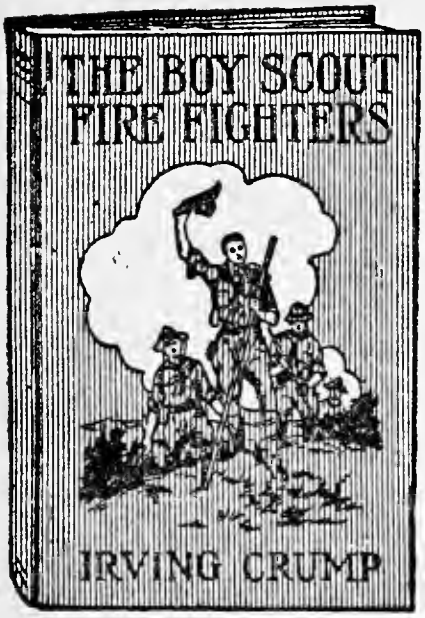

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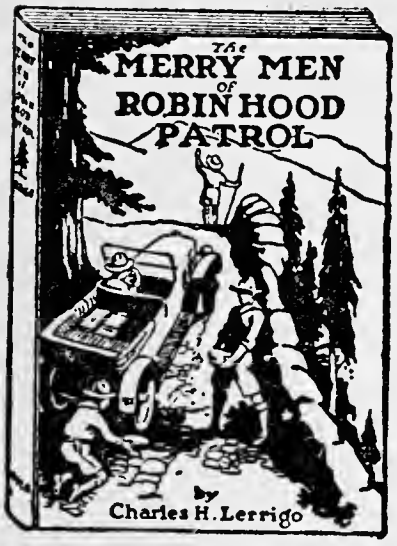

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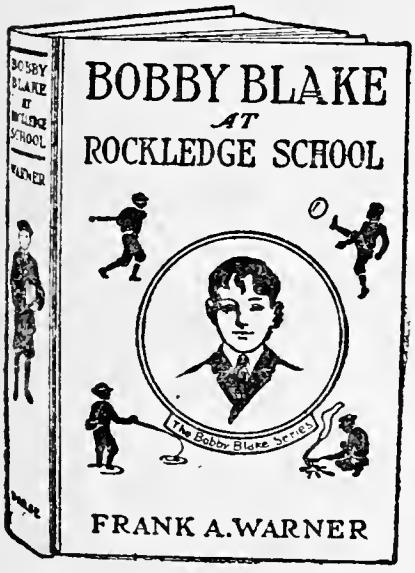

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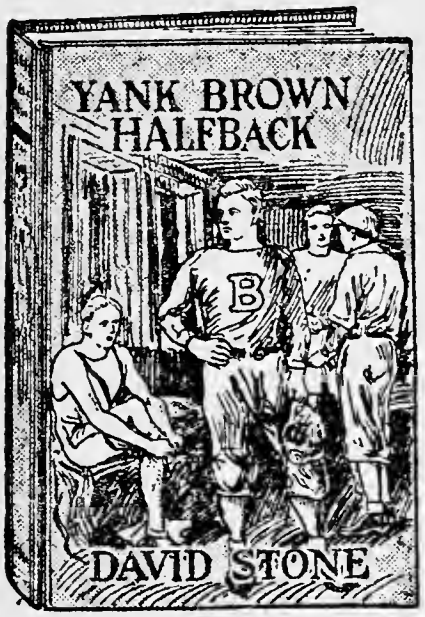

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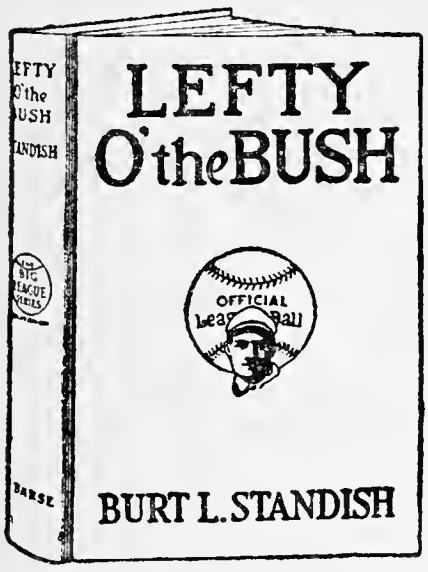

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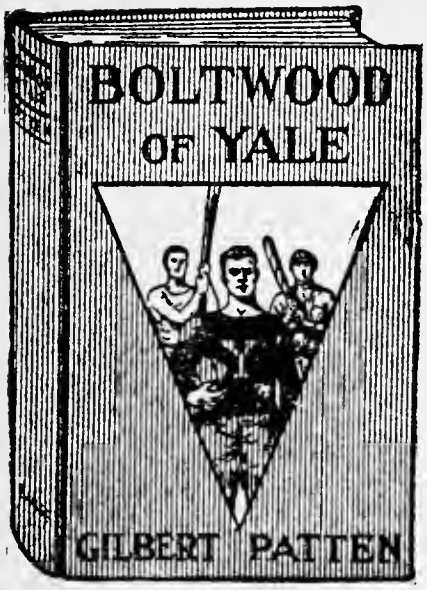

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